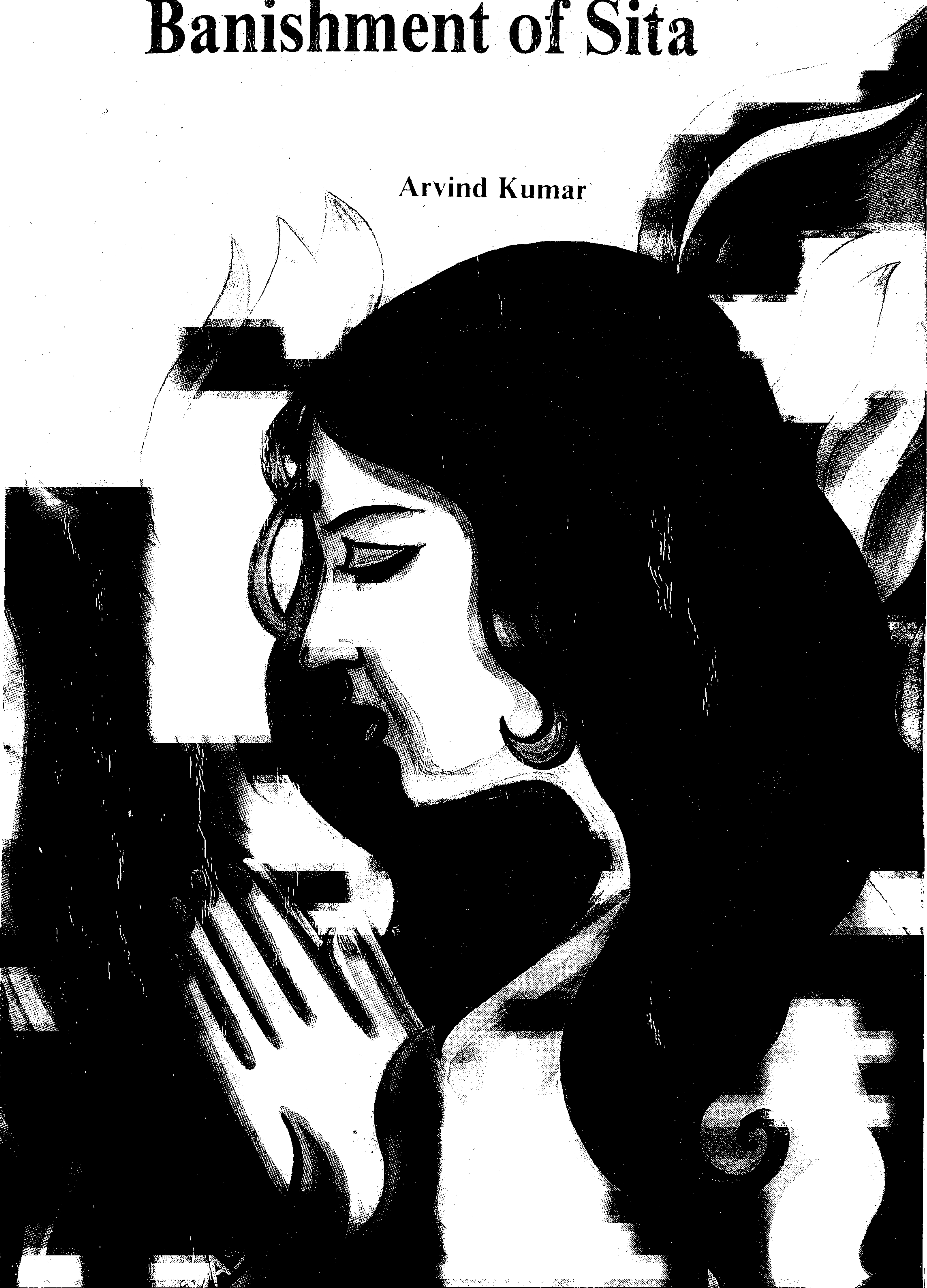


Vishv Books

Banishment of Sita

Arvind Kumar



A Study In The Ethics Of The BANISHMENT OF SITA

Arvind Kumar



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Preface

The July 1957 issue of SARITA—the Hindi monthly magazine—carried a poem entitled *Ram Ka Antardwandwa*, written by Mr Arvind Kumar. The poem somehow or the other caught the attention of Arya Samajist Hindi, Urdu press of Delhi, which is out to explore every avenue in search of excuses for rousing communal passions. About two months after the publication of the poem a Hindi daily of the group ran a front page heading and started printing spurious letters to the editor against the poem. Then there was an avalanche of stage-managed protests against the poem. Resolutions against the poem were passed by all Arya Samaj, Sanatan Dharm Sabha, Hindu Maha Sabha branches all over India. Demonstrations were held. One night the office of the SARITA magazine was attacked by a violent mob organized by some hirelings. After stoning the premises to their hearts' content, the mob tried to set the building on fire. My effigy was burnt, and threats were held that the author and I would be lynched. Perhaps there was no city, no town, no street, no house left throughout the Hindi-speaking area in the country where the poem was not discussed. This, however, provided an occasion for a frank and widespread analysis of the character of Ram—the hero of Valmiki *Ramayan*.

Surprisingly enough, though the so-called “organized” Hindu opinion was expressing itself against the poem, individuals from every class, every sphere and area were coming out to support the poem and SARITA. Offers of monetary support poured in.

The Delhi Administration banned the relevant issue of

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SARITA and launched criminal proceedings under Section 295 (A) of the Indian Penal Code, against the author and myself as printer-publisher of the poem, before the Resident Magistrate of New Delhi.

Among those who appeared as witnesses for the prosecution were: Mr Narendra, editor, *Daily Pratap* (Urdu) and *Daily Vir Arjun* (Hindi), Mr Ranbir, editor, *Daily Milap* (Urdu), late Pandit Goswami Ganesh Datt, President, All India Sanatan Dharm Sabha, and about 12 more representatives of various Arya Samaj and Sanatan Dharm Sabha branches.

Pandit Sunder Lal, famous author of *Bharat Men Angrezi Raj* and *Gita Aur Kuran*, Pandit Satya Dev Vidyalkar, an Arya Samajist scholar and veteran journalist, Mr Manmatha Nath Gupta, renowned revolutionary and journalist, and Pandit Rameshwaracharya Shastri, Secretary, All India Sanatan Dharm Maha Mandal, appeared for defence and stated that all that Mr Arvind Kumar had written was in the tradition of the Ram legend. Mr Arvind Kumar also filed a detailed statement in his defence.

The Resident Magistrate held both the accused guilty and sentenced them to pay a fine of Rs 250 each or undergo 2 months' rigorous imprisonment.

An appeal was filed before the Additional District and Sessions Judge, Delhi, who accepting the explanation given by the accused Mr Arvind Kumar in his written statement acquitted both the accused.

There has been a considerable demand from the readers for the full text of the defence statement. It was considered that the statement had some more value than the immediate legal use. Perhaps it is the first objective and frank discussion on some aspects of *Ramayan*. Of course, its scope is limited by the use it was put to. A more detailed and full study of *Ramayan* is certainly called for.

Unfortunately the ban on the poem still continues, and it is not possible to give it here for the readers to judge its merits.

(ii)

The theme of the poem was the inner conflict in the mind of Ram when he exiled Sita on grounds of public censure. The theme was treated in a truly psychological manner, and the text was based mainly on Valmiki *Ramayan*. The poem was written in the form of a dramatic monologue delivered by Ram just before his taking the decision to exile Sita. Ram reviews all his days spent with or in thinking about Sita, and finds that he loves her very much, but that his unconfirmed doubts regarding her chastity have made his life difficult.

Some very interesting things came to light during the course of the "movement" against the poem and the trial. None of the Hindu communal leaders was conversant with the story of *Ramayan*. They confessed that they were not fully conversant with *Ramayan*. Some of these leaders were trustees of famous Hindu temples in Delhi and elsewhere in North India, and testified their ignorance in their statements in the court. Two of these were known Hindu editors of daily papers in Delhi.

It seems that the Arya Samaj today has lost all fervour, all idealism; to get popular it is ready to pander to any weakness of the public, to whet and lead any orthodox and communal movement that may come its way. In fact, Arya Samaj leaders are engaged in a free-for-all competition to get positions of vantage by excelling each other in undoing Swami Dayanand's work, who categorically repudiated the theory of Avatars and the divinity of Ram and Krishna and other gods.

Free discussion has always been a great quality of Hinduism's attempts at improving itself. This is how I interpret Sanatan Dharm—the religion of eternal inquiry. It is ever-changing. Every new decade has found it at a new place. Movements like Arya Samaj and others have come to reform it, but in the process have themselves become more orthodox and narrower in their outlook. While Arya Samaj today has its Pandits and Popes, the broad masses are

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gradually doing away with priests and still calling themselves Sanatanists.

Belief in God, incarnations, etc, is not a cardinal point of Sanatanism. The priests have made it look so. But I have great faith in our peoples' capacity to adjust themselves to a changing world. To me the writing and publication of poems like *Ram Ka Antardwandwa* and of the present booklet are the masses' efforts in this very direction. I am sure the real Sanatanist spirit of inquiry will emerge victorious over blind faith and the people will discard the outdated beliefs and practices to enable the Hindus and India to attain a status which unfortunately has not so far been obtained due to more than a thousand years' slavery under all sorts of adventurers, slaves, goondas and traders.

VISHWA NATH

To
The True
Sanatanist Spirit
Of
Eternal Inquiry

The Conflict

Banish Sita to the forest? Impossible!
My Sita for whom I built the *setubandh*,
For whom I gathered a *banar sena*,
And spilled my wrath on Lanka.

But did I kill Ravana for Sita's sake?
Or to defend my ego, my pride?
To take revenge, to prove my masculinity
Which was bruised by Sita's capture?
True, Sita was the excuse, Sita the sufferer,
But Aryan blood must conquer demon blood...

Oh Sita, my Sita, how can I banish you?
Yet, how can I keep you by my side?
How can I know if this Sita is my own Sita—
Sita inviolate, Sita the divine, whom
Janaka found under the plough?
Sharer of my joys, my sorrows,
The Sita of Chitrakoot and Panchavati
Who had passed the test of devotion?
But is this Sita the same Sita? Is she?
How then, did she allow Ravana to take her?
Or did she herself decide to go with him?

Did she not act of her own free will?
Her every wish was my command

Her whim that I chase Maarichi
Her command that Lakshman follow me
All a plot of the wicked Ravana?
Or, planned by both together?

O, 10-headed monster of trickery and treachery,
Demon of deceit and evil powers.
Annihilated in the conflagration of my wrath.
And yet... who knows if his handsome form
Still lives on in Sita's heart?
Oh, Sita! Were those tremblings
Of apprehension—or of passion?
In the beautiful bower of Ashokas dripping desire,
Did not the breeze of Indra's garden intoxicate you?
Did not Cupid's arrows conquer you?
Did not all the grandeur and glory overwhelm you?
Did not his evil magic overpower you?
No, no! sinful thoughts arise in my mind
For my mind is weak, but Sita was strong.
She could not fall
Yet, who is above temptation?

The greatest sages, the purest virgins
Have been felled by Kama's fatal shaft
None, not even I, have vanquished him:
My heart had fluttered
Even by Ravana's sister—her frail beauty;
Won without a war
By, her humble beseechings for salvation.

Fear was my salvation then: fear of myself.
And now too, the heart is constantly besieged...
But propriety must stifle passion,
Decorum must cloak desire,
For I am the king.
To be the ideal, the idol
I must guard the ranks: rule with rectitude.
For my lineage, my heritage I must fight
And trample my desires,
Cover my father's drunken orgies—
His neglected duties,
With a great edifice: a shining example
Of righteousness and justice
Whose brilliance eclipses its hollowness...
So, would not Sita have fallen too?
I did not trust her then,
So she went through the ordeal by fire
But I do not trust her still...
The demon of doubt mocks me
For I do not trust myself either
I have no peace.
I cannot eat, I cannot sleep.
My very life has become a hoax;
For I know I cannot live without Sita
And yet, how can I live with her?
There is no way out, no escape...
From this fire of doubt in which I burn...

So be it. The show must go on
To the forest will I banish her
In her name with one more act of justice,
Will do her yet another injustice.
But after winning Lanka by subterfuge,
Killing Vaali and winning Vibhishan
With yet another ruse,
All in Sita's name—does it matter?
Today, I will use the washerman for my excuse.
So let Sita's exile be another stepping stone.
To the edifice of rectitude, of Ramrajya,
Another tribute to the idol, the ideal...
In this alone will lie the good—
For me, my self-respect and for sita.

Publication of *The Conflict* in *Sarita Hindi Magazine* (in 1957) was objected to by various Hindu religious and political parties on the ground that it had hurt their (the Hindus') sentiments and beliefs. These leaders threatened to liquidate the Editor & Publisher as well as the author of the poem. They also launched an agitation which turned into a riot and the agitators attempted to set Delhi Press Building on fire.

Due to this agitation, the Delhi Administration proscribed the said issue of *Sarita Hindi Magazine* and filed a criminal case against the Editor, Publisher & Printer, Mr. Vishwa Nath, and the author under Section 295 A of the Indian Penal Code.

The Delhi Sessions Judge dismissed the case and acquitted both the Editor, Publisher and the author as the State failed to prove the case.

IN THE POEM *Ram Ka Antardwandwa* an attempt was made to show the state of Ram's mind at a particular moment in his life (that is, when he decided to exile Sita), having regard to the merits and defects, motives and actions attributed to him by the various versions of *Ramayan* and by the many commentators on *Ramayan*. Also no part of the portrayal of Ram (in the poem) was an innovation. In fact, the poem had merely captured the illusion built around Ram by the various authors. And this was done in keeping with the great traditions of *Ramayan*.

The poem was an essay not on the whole life and total personality of Ram, but what the author considered Ram could have been, or what Ram could have been thinking, or how Ram's mind could have been working on a particular moment in his life, and how Ram would review certain points in his past life at that given time.

Mediaeval Hindi poetry can boast of epics which narrate great deeds of great persons. But no poem makes even an attempt to look into the inner recesses of its hero's mind. Most of the Mediaeval Hindi poetry is either devotional or formalistic portrayal of a 'Ras'. Modern Hindi poetry is limited, mostly, to love-lyrics or "progressive" propagandist poems which demand bread for the worker. It lacks the great, noble and passionate characters of a Euripides or a Sophocles. There is no Marlowe to sing of the ambitions, failures and desires of a Tamerlaine and a Dr Faustus, no

Shakespeare to delineate mental agonis of an Othello, crucial uncertainties of a Hamlet, elemental sufferings of a King Lear, strange complexities of an Iago, democratic ardour of a Brutus, and so on.

The author of *Ram Ka Antardwandwa* wanted to fill in this gap in Hindi literature. He wanted to write such poems. But to write in such a vein on foreign subjects would mean wastage of effort. Having no associations with the Indian mind, such poems would evoke no literary response. Evidently the subject of this type of a poem had to be in-keeping with the genius of the Indian people. Only those characters, who are intimately known to us, and the depiction of the state of their minds, would evoke the required artistic response in a Hindi reader.

As important as the choice of a subject was the medium of expression, the body, the form of the poem. He decided to write dramatic monologues—a character appearing on the stage at a crucial point in his life, and thinking loudly, expressing in words what goes on in his mind. It was in this background that the subject of the poem *Ram Ka Antardwandwa* was chosen.

From our very childhood we hear the story of *Ramayan*. No adequate, convincing answer is given to the question: “Why did Ram exile Sita when he had already tested her chastity through the fire-ordeal in Lanka?” This is a question which comes up insistently before all students of *Ramayan*. Many eminent persons have said that they do not like the Sita Banvas episode in *Ramayan* and consider the action a blemish on Ram’s character.

The usual answer that is given is that Ram exiled Sita because he wanted to set an example of service to the people, that he wanted to set a precedent. But this is hardly convincing, because, at the same time, we know Ram is reputed to be the most ideal king. Even today the term *Ramrajya* means “best government”. Now, an ideal king would dispense ideal justice. Sita was pure, chaste, the best woman of her time, as

every reader of *Ramayan* knows. Ram knew that Sita was chaste, as she had proved successful in the fire-ordeal. Would Ram, the ideal king, punish Sita on a charge which he knew was baseless? In the ordinary course we would expect him, in his capacity as a king, either to take no notice of the rumours, or to punish the rumourmongers. Thus, we cannot attribute the action of banishing Sita to Ram, the king. Evidently for a convincing answer to the question, we must look into Ram the man.

Again, if Ram was acting as a king, he is expected to have given Sita a chance to clear herself. This he did not. He merely asked Lakshman to go and leave Sita near the Valmiki Ashram on the pretext of her desire to go there. Ram did not even see Sita before she was sent away. This only shows he was acting as an individual, as a man, not as a king.

That he was not acting as a God is also clear. God Indra once defiled the chastity of Ahalya, the wife of sage Gautam. Ahalya the impure was purified by the touch of God Ram. Even if we take Sita to be impure she would automatically be purified by God Ram's touch. That she was not so purified only shows Ram at 'that' time was not God, and was only a man.

In fact when Ram exiled Sita, he was only a husband—a husband who had some reservations in his mind. If, being fully sure of Sita's purity, Ram was still exiling her because the people were talking ill of him, the reservation would be of cowardice, of not having the courage to face one who had demonstrated all her courage in following him into the jungles and braved all the difficulties smilingly. An alternate reservation could have been of hidden, sub-conscious or conscious doubts in Sita's purity. This Othello-complex is among the most common of manly weaknesses. You talk loosely about any woman, even if other men do not completely believe you, your remarks will find a niche in their minds and come up now and then. If a doubt in his wife once enters a man's mind, it will never leave him. Seeds of tragedy

are sown with the doubts. Ram had already publicly expressed his doubts in the purity of Sita when she was brought back from Ravan's house. When he exiled her, he was only reaping the sad harvest of family tragedy.

As one thinks more and more about Sita Banvas, one is more and more gripped by the predicament the great man Ram at that time found himself in. Ram, the brave warrior, Ram, the hero of his race, Ram, the intense lover of Sita, torn by doubts, tormented by conflicts, confused in mind on finding himself in such a situation—all this provided a highly fit subject for the new type of poem that *Ram Ka Antardwandwa* is. Such a poem would explain and justify the seemingly inexplicable conduct of Ram.

RAMAYAN'S PUBLIC IMAGE

NOW LET us turn to a brief discussion of the various written and legendary versions of *Ramayan*. This is necessary to show how much conflicting, contradictory views are held by our people not only about the plot of *Ramayan*, but also about the characters of important persons in *Ramayan*—particularly Ram. We shall try to see how this is completely in keeping with the literary traditions the world over, particularly in India.

First let us take up glaring differences in the general outline of the plot, then the differences in the description of the individual scenes (giving examples mostly from those scenes with which we are concerned more intimately).

“According to the *Dasharath Jatak*, king Dasharath had three offsprings from his first major queen: two sons (Ram Pandit and Lakshman) and one daughter (Sita Devi). Another queen was made the major queen on the death of the first one. One son (Bharat Kumar) was born to the new queen. Dasharath promised a boon to the queen on this occasion. When Bharat was seven years old, the queen asked Dasharath to declare him his heir. Dasharath declined to oblige. But when the queen started pressing her point everyday, Dasharath becoming afraid of intrigues called his elder

sons to him and advised them to go and live in a jungle and to return on his death to rule the kingdom. Then Dasharath called astrologers and asked them to tell him when he would die. They told him he would die twelve years afterwards. Now Dasharath told his sons: Rule the kingdom after twelve years. After saluting their father, the sons got ready to depart. Sita too got her father's permission to accompany them. All the three now started for the jungle. Many others wanted to accompany them but were turned back by the three. The three reached the Himalayas and lived there in an Ashram.

"After nine years, Dasharath dies of the sorrow. The queen fails to instal her son Bharat on the throne as the ministers and Bharat himself oppose her. Then Bharat gathers his forces and takes them to Ram. He wants to induce Ram to return to the kingdom. Leaving the forces in the neighbourhood, Bharat in company with chosen ministers approaches Ram in the Ashram. Ram is alone at that time. Bharat narrates how his father died and starts weeping. Ram Pandit neither feels sorrow nor weeps.

"In the evening Lakshman and Sita, too, come back to the Ashram. Hearing the news of their father's death, they feel great sorrow. Ram Pandit gives them a religious discourse on the inevitable death of everything. Hearing this discourse everyone becomes free from sorrow.

"Ram declines Bharat's invitation to come back and rule, by saying: 'I was asked by my father to rule the kingdom after twelve years. If I return now I will be disobeying him. I will come after three years'.

"When Bharat too declines to rule, Ram gives him his grass-sandals, saying: 'These will rule till I come back'.

"Bharat, Lakshman and Sita, accompanied by other men, return to the kingdom, with the grass-sandals. Ministers rule with the help of these sandals. Whenever any injustice is done, the sandals strike each other. They keep calm if justice is administered correctly.

“After three years Ram Pandit returns, and marries his sister Sita. After ruling for over sixteen thousand years, in an ideal religious way, Ram goes to heaven.”

(As abridged by Dr Kamil Bulke in his Hindi book *Ramkatha*.)

The unique elements in this one of the oldest versions of *Ramayan* are:

(1) The plot is the first of the three parts of the currently popular story. These three parts are: (a) Ram-Dasharath-Bharat-Kaikeyi story, or the court intrigue story, (b) Ram-Sita-Ravan story, or the conquest of the south story, (c) Ram-Sita-Valmiki story, or the sorrows of Sita story. *Dasharath Jatak* is the narration of only the first part of the presently popular story.

(2) Ram and Sita are brother and sister, and marry each other.

(3) The main characteristic of Ram's character is his religious attitude towards life.

Uttar Puran is another early version of *Ramayan*.

“King Dasharath (of Banaras) has four sons: Ram from his wife Subala, Lakshman from Kaikeyi, and later on when Dasharath shifts his capital from Banaras to Saketpur (Ayodhya), Bharat and Shatrughan are born from another queen whose name is not given. Dashanan (Ravan) is the son of Pulastya of the Vinami Vidyadhar clan. One day he sees Manimati, the daughter of Amitnag, doing tapasya, and, being bitten by her beauty, he tries to disturb her tapasya. Manimati forecasts: ‘I will take birth as his daughter and kill him.’ After her death she comes in the womb of Mandodari (the wife of Ravan). On her birth, the astrologers tell Ravan that she will cause his destruction. Ravan getting afraid, orders Marich to abandon the child in some wild place. Marich puts the child-girl in a box and buries her in the kingdom of Mithila. The box is unearthed by a plough and is taken to king Janak. Janak opens the box and finds a girl in it whom he names Sita and brings her up as a daughter. After

a long time Janak invites Ram and Lakshman to defend a yajna. At the end of this yajna Ram weds Sita and seven other maidens, and Lakshman weds sixteen maidens including Prithvidevi. Both Ram and Lakshman seek and get their father's permission to live in Banaras.

“Narad describes Sita's great beauty to Ravan who decides to abduct her. Surpnakha is sent to test Sita's mind. When Ram and Sita are on a pleasure trip to Chitrakut (near Banaras) Marich appears as a golden deer and leads Ram far away. Meanwhile Ravan, in the garb of Ram, presents himself before Sita and tells her that he has ordered the golden deer to be taken to the palace, and asks her to step in the 'palaki'. This palaki is, in fact, the Pushpak Viman which flies Sita to Lanka. Ravan does not touch Sita as that would mean an end to his sky-flying art.

“Dasharath, in a dream, comes to know that Sita has been abducted by Ravan. Dasharath sends this information to Ram. Meanwhile Sugriv and Hanuman come to seek help against Bali. Hanuman goes to Lanka and returns after giving hope to Sita (no mention is made of the burning of Lanka). After this Bali is killed by Lakshman and Sugriv gets his kingdom. Now the combined forces of Ram and the monkey-kingdom march towards Lanka. In the end of the detailed description of the war, Lakshman cuts off Ravan's head by a *Chakra*. After this Lakshman conquers all the directions, becomes Ardh-Chakravarti, and returns to Ayodhya. Lakshman has 16,000 queens, and Ram has 8,000 queens. Sita gives birth to eight sons (no mention is made of Sita Banvas episode). Lakshman dies of an incurable disease, and goes to hell due to his killing of Ravan. Ram makes Prithvisundar, son of Lakshman, the king, and Aji-tanjay, son of Sita, the heir to Prithvisundar. Then Ram is initiated into a religious order and gets Moksha. Sita, too, with many other queens, gets initiated.”

(As abridged by Dr Kamil Bulke in *Ramkatha*.)

Among the unique points of this version are:

- (1) Sita is the daughter of Ravan.
- (2) Ram has eight thousand wives. Valmiki and Tulsidas insist that Ram had only one wife.
- (3) This version has two parts of the main story, but in a complicated form.
- (4) Ram is less important than Lakshman. It is Lakshman who kills Bali and Ravan.

It will be appropriate if we take up here the differences in the characterization of Ram, before proceeding to point out contradictions in the details of the *Ramayan* plot.

We have just now seen that in *Dasharath Jatak* Ram is a religious-minded prince who marries his sister, an act which would be considered a great sin today. In *Uttar Puran*, he is a pleasure-seeking prince who has a huge harem of queens to give him pleasure. In Hemchandra's *Ramayan* Ram has four wives. In Valmiki, Ram has only Sita as his wife, but enjoys many other women. Valmiki describes a scene (*Uttar Kand*, Canto 42, *Shloks* 18-22) in the pleasure gardens of Ayodhya like this: "There were fine quilts spread in the garden. Ram served pure wines to Sita just as Indra offers wines to Shachi. Servants brought many kinds of meats and fruit. Many dancers and singers came and danced and sang. Generous-hearted and most beautiful women, who were adept in the art of singing and dancing, came and drank wine and danced. Ram, who knows how to please everyone, indulged in those women." This is in keeping with Valmiki's description of kings' harems. Dasharath had only three wedded wives, but a big number of women belonging to the Kshatriya, Vaishya, and Shudra castes also filled his harem. Valmiki has referred to them in the description of the Ashwamedh Yajna organized by Dasharath (*Balkand*, Canto 14, *Shloks* 33-36.)

Tulsidas shows Ram generally as infallible. But when Ram comes across Sita for the first time (this is before he has broken the bow and married her) he immediately falls in love with her. He feels as if the God of Love was out to conquer

the whole world. This is a complete innovation on the part of Tulsidas. After reading this it looks as if Ram would fall in love with any beautiful woman he comes across. In fact, in this scene Tulsidas describes Ram as an unconscious hypocrite, for Tulsidas says: "While he (Ram) talked thus (of the great self-control of men belonging to the Raghu clan) to his younger brother, in his heart he was desiring Sita."

There are many sects which assert that it was Ram who started the practice of *raslilas*. In his incarnation Ram had organized ninety-nine *raslilas*. As he wanted to complete the century, he took another incarnation as Krishna and organized the last *raslila*. This view is among the most popular views of today.

In Ayodhya, the birth-place of Ram and the centre of the Ram cult, 'bhajans' are sung today in which Ram is shown indulging in women recklessly. The devotees of this cult call themselves staunch *Sanatanists*, and nobody has ever said that they are irreligious. Acharya Ram Chandra Shukla, in his famous *Hindi Sahitya Ka Itihas*, which is taught as a text book for any Hindi examination of importance, has quoted (on page 154) some of their *bhajans*, one of which translated into English would read as:

"My lover is standing on the banks of Sarju river.

Putting aside my sense of hesitation and shame, I went where the elder brother of Lakshman was standing.

He smiled sweetly, caught hold my hand, and gave a pull at the cloth I was wearing.

He took me behind a bush of the 'jhau' trees, and started indulging in the sex act."

Even deities in Hindu scriptures have not been shown above human susceptibilities and weaknesses. The few observations above have been made to show not only how there are differences about the general plot of *Ramayan*, but also how people differ about the characteristics of its hero—Ram.

Now let us discuss very briefly how the many versions

and popular legends differ in the details of individual episodes, changing the very complexion of the story.

Valmiki does not mention Sita's *swayambar*. In Valmiki, Ram was passing through Janak's kingdom and broke the bow of Shiv, on which Janak decided to marry Sita to Ram. In *Tulsi*, Janak organizes a special function to hold the *swayambar*. All the famous kings and princes (including Ravan) are invited to it. Ram reaches there by chance, meets Sita before the function and both of them fall in love with each other. This must be considered a great lapse on behalf of Sita, because according to conventions and customs, she could not fall in love with anybody before that person had broken the bow of Shiv.

Similarly, if you read the Ram Banvas episode in Valmiki, you get an idea of a court intrigue in progress. First Dasharath sends Bharat away, then builds up a public opinion in favour of Ram, sees Ram in seclusion and tells him that this (when Bharat is away) is Ram's only chance to get crowned as the heir apparent. On getting Dasharath's message a second time Ram gets suspicious that Dasharath might have changed his mind. Kaikeyi comes to know of the whole thing, and disturbs, in fact, overturns the plans overnight. Kaushalya raves against Kaikeyi, mentions her past intrigues, Lakshman threatens to revolt against and kill his lecherous, irreligious father. All this is not found in *Tulsidas*.

In the Sita abduction scene, Valmiki makes no mention of the 'line' that Lakshman, according to *Tulsidas*, drew around Sita. In Valmiki, after Lakshman, disgusted at the treatment he received at the hands of Sita, has gone to seek Ram, Ravan comes to Sita, in the garb of a Sannyasi. Sita welcomes him. Both talk about their families, Ravan expresses his love for Sita, and on her refusing to come with him, Ravan forcibly takes her away. In *Tulsidas*, Lakshman draws the 'line' before going away, Sita comes out of it to give alms to Ravan who has come in the garb of a Sannyasi and takes her away.

Similarly, there are various causes attributed for Sita Banvas. These we shall discuss at a later and more appropriate stage.

According to Valmiki, Lav and Kush were the twins born to Sita in the Valmiki Ashram. But there is a popular legend according to which Lav was Sita's first born in the Valmiki Ashram. Kush was later on created from grass by Valmiki when Sita feared that Lav was lost or dead. According to Valmiki, Lav and Kush narrated the story of *Ramayan* in the darbar of Ram and were thus revealed to him. But a most popular legend says that Ram once organized an Ashwamedh Yajna. Conquering armies of Ram were following the sacred horse wherever it went. No rival king dared to check the horse (conventionally, those who did not check the horse accepted overlordship of Ram). But Lav and Kush tied the horse to their hut, and fought against the whole army and defeated it. This version is found also in Bhavbhuti's *Uttar Ramcharit*. Again, in Valmiki, Sita comes to Ram's darbar before she enters the earth, but according to the legends, Ram goes to the Valmiki Ashram and Sita, declining to go with him, enters the earth.

Thus we see every episode, every character of *Ramayan* has been told differently by different people in different regions of India. A detailed study of the development of the *Ramayan* plot has been made by Dr Kamil Bulke, Ph.D., Head of the Hindi Deptt. Government College, Ranchi, in his monumental book, *Ramkatha*. On his book he was awarded doctorate by the Allahabad University. The book has been published by the University itself.

The writing, rewriting, reinterpreting of important works is a unique literary tradition all the world over. This tradition has been particularly strong in India. Kalidas's treatment of Dushyant-and-Shakuntala story is entirely different from his original in *Mahabharat*. Bhavbhuti's *Uttar Ramcharit* is as different from Valmiki's *Ramayan* as air is from the earth.

Mr C. Rajagopalachari, in Epilogue of his book *Ramayan*, says: "Rain falling from the heavens flows into the rivers and flows down to join the sea. Again from the sea the water is sucked up by the sun and rises to the sky, whence it descends again as rain and flows down as rivers. Even so, feelings and values rise from the people and, touching the poet's heart, are transformed into a poem which, in turn, enlighten and inspire the people."

Late Mr V.V.S. Aiyar, the founder of the famous Tamil Gurukulam at Shermadevi, and renowned Tamil scholar, in Preface of his *A Study Of The Ramayana Of Kamban* refers to this Indian tradition of rewriting and reinterpreting at length:

"It is a curious fact that during the whole course of our long literary history, until very recent times, no Sanskrit classic has been literally translated into any of our vernaculars. The *Ramayan*, *Mahabharat*, the *Bhagavat* and the *Skand Puran* have been among the literary treasures that poets from every part of India have attempted to render into their mother-tongues. But in no single vernacular is there a literal translation of any of these divine poems which dates from more than three or four decades ago. On the contrary, all the old poetical renderings of these classics in the vernaculars are no more than free adaptations from their originals.

"This tendency to rewrite the stories of the Sanskrit classics instead of translating them seems to be a common instinct with the peoples of India, for, so far we can see, it cannot have been the result of imitation by one people of the literary methods of another.

"The earliest adaptation of Sanskrit classic into a vernacular tongue is most probably that of the *Mahabharat* into Tamil by Perun Devanar who is said to have lived in the first century of the Sakabd. Since then, the *Skand Puran*, the *Ramayan* and the stories of Nal and Harishchandra, among others, have been rendered into Tamil by scores of poets, but not one of these renderings is a mere translation.

“We find the same phenomenon in Telugu. The monumental *Bharatam* of Nannayya and Tikkanna has nothing in common with Vyas’s *Mahabharat* except the story. There is nothing to show that the authors of the Telugu *Bharatam* took to this method of adapting the Sanskrit epic instead of translating it from the example of Tamil poets. The same is the case with Bhaskar’s *Ramayan* Tulsidas’s *Ramcharit Manas* and other vernacular classics of India.

“All these poets have dealt very freely with their originals. Their tropes and fancies, their imagery, their descriptions and dissertations are not those of the original poems but their own. They develop certain incidents, cut down certain others, and introduce interludes, fables, allegories or new incidents according to their pleasure. In short what they write are new poems altogether and not translations. And this tendency is to be seen among writers of provinces situated so wide apart as Bengal and the Tamil country and Gujarat, and of ages extending from the first century up to our own times.

“If you look into the matter carefully, this method of popularizing the stories revered by the people will appear much better than the Western method of literally translating them into poetry. For, the attitude of mind in which the poet has to place himself in the attempt to translate from one language into another acts as a drag upon all his higher faculties, so that even poets of a very high order are failures when they descend to translation on a large scale. Coleridge hit the nail on the head when he said, ‘The translation of poetry into poetry is difficult, because the translator must give a brilliancy to his language without that warmth of original conception from which such brilliance would follow of its own accord.’ The mind of the poet is checked in its flight when it is weighed with the thoughts and images of the original which he has to render closely into another language. His mind loses its natural flow and has to substitute for it a simulacrum by all sorts of subterfuges. And the result is a

travesty of the original which is not merely below the original, but even below the average quality of the works of the translator himself, as one can see by comparing, for instance, Pope's *Iliad and Odyssey* with his other works.

“Hence it is that Indian poets even of the second rank have with unerring good sense abstained from translating the Sanskrit classic, but instead have rewritten them in their own way for their countrymen. Thus while Europe has to take one representative each from the Greek and the Latin literatures—but one *Iliad* and one *Aeneid* and a host of translations of these epics, India has not one *Ramayan* and one *Mahabharat* but at least a score of *Ramayans* and *Mahabharats*. No doubt these are of unequal merit, but each one of them is at least as great as unhampered flight of its author's genius could make it.”

This much for the live tradition of *Ramayan*. This vast, varying and often contradictory mine of legends has gone into determining the liquid image of *Ramayan* in the public mind. The outlines of this image are undefined, vague and indistinct. What *Ramayan* means to one person may be meaningless to another. We cannot assert that a particular picture of *Ramayan* in a person's mind is right or wrong. The image of Ram and his actions differ from region to region, city to city, street to street and from person to person.

Eminent sociologists, historians and commentators, see different meanings in *Ramayan*—that is not in the actual translation of the words but in the interpretation of the actions described. Historians like Lassen and Weber consider the *Ramayan*-story a representation of the Aryans' expansion over the South which was spearheaded by sage Agastya and Prince Ram.

Dr S.K. Chatterjee, the Khaira Professor of Indian Linguistics and Phonetics in the University of Calcutta, while discussing “Racemovements and Prehistoric Culture” of India, in “The History and Culture of the Indian People—Part I the

Vedic Age” (published by Bhartiya Vidya Bhavan, in the general editorship of Dr K.M. Munshi) says:

“Myths and legends of Gods and Heroes current among the Austrics and Dravidians, long antedating the period of Aryan advent in India (C. 1500 B.C.), appear to have been rendered into the Aryan language in late and garbled, or improved versions, accommodating themselves to the Aryan God and Hero-Worlds; and it is these myths and legends of gods, kings and sages, which we largely find in the Purans. The Ram legend looks like a blend of three distinct stories without any historicity put together at different times (The Ayodhya intrigue and the banishment of Ram, the abduction of Sita and her recovery by Ram, and the episode of the monkey princes), and seems to have grown up in eastern India, with an Austric background but later it was re-edited as a national poem within the gorgeous framework of the composite and highly complex Hindu civilization of 2,000 years ago.”

Many say that *Ramayan* is an allegory on the great struggle that is waged in the mind of every individual between the good and the bad. Some say that there actually was in history a prince named Ram but the depiction and characterization of Ram in *Ramayan* is an idealization of the historical tendencies. Others insist that the story of Ram is completely fictitious. This is the view held by Mahatma Gandhi and Vinoba Bhave. Vinoba said this in a speech: “It is possible to rewrite Ramayan...after all it is not a book of history. It is a fiction.” (Quoted by Mr. Suresh Ram, in ‘Vinoba And His Mission’, published by the Akhil Bharat Sarv Seva Sangh.) Mr. C. Rajagopalachari says: “Many meanings can be read in the Ramayan.”

RAM AS OUR HERO

LET US NOW study Ram as he stood at that crucial point in his life—the Ram whom the poem *Ram Ka Antardwandwa* portrays. He is not Ram—the Avatar, the God. He is Ram—a literary character, representative of a flesh and blood man, a hero, a prince who like Ulysses went through many difficult and great adventures, and in the end exiled his wife. Ram is never referred to as an Avatar in the poem. He is simply a man—a man at a crucial, difficult moment in his life. It is that rare moment which, when it comes in the life of an individual, gives a new colour, a new meaning to all his past life in a quick sequence. In such a moment, the pain of taking an unhappy decision against one's most beloved thing in life confuses the mind, tilts the whole outlook, the person loses true perspective of life, imagines baseless things, gives them undue importance, and so on.

The Ram of *Ram Ka Antardwandwa* has intense love for Sita; in expressing the sentiments of her praise, he is very emphatic, when he tries to find faults, shortcomings and weaknesses in her, he is, at best, unsure, doubtful, and in conflict. Even a suggestion of any fault in Sita revolts his heart. But the cantankerous worm of doubts is feasting on his mind. A tug-of-war is going on inside him. When doubt

in his wife's chastity enters the portals of a man's mind, peace leaves from the backdoor. Peace becomes the greatest need of the hour. In fact, it is his need for peace that forces the Ram of this poem to exile Sita and not any confirmation of his doubts.

This is the main theme of the poem. Other points arise as subsidiaries to this main point. We have to take care that these points are not arising in the mind of an ordinary man. This man is a hero caught in the meshes of an unprecedented agony.

Ram's being exiled from the throne of Ayodhya which had come almost in his grasp was not as painful as this. Sita's abduction was a great cause of sorrow, but it did not entail such an inner conflict; it only goaded him to action. Lakshman's getting unconscious on the battlefield was an occasion for dismay, but it was not so much of his own doing. Ram's real trial started when he was, for the first time after Sita's abduction, confronted with her, on the victorious battlefield of Lanka. "Feelings of anger, happiness and misery appeared together on his face," says Valmiki, "Ram was not particularly pleased with the coming of Sita."

So far he had been moving onwards as if in a trance, like an obsessed person. Now, when Ravan was dead and Sita was before him, he was brought face to face with reality. What would he do with Sita? He tries to analyse his mind. He finds that it was not his desire to get Sita back that was goading him to action, but his hurt vanity, his sense of prestige and manhood that forced him to avenge himself on the perpetrator of the great insult. He declines to take Sita back, on the ground that Ravan might have defiled her chastity. He also says that he has started doubting even Sita's character.

Sita is stunned to hear him speak like this. But she has a very fit answer to his criticism. Says she: "The heart which is in my control, is still devoted to you. I have no power on my body, because being a weak woman I cannot defend it."

Hence I am blameless". Then chiding Ram, "Why did you not abandon me when you sent Hanuman as your messenger to me? I would have committed suicide at that time," she asks Lakshman to prepare a fire for her so as she could die on it.

Maybe Sita's strong words uttered with great feeling and her readiness to commit suicide moved Ram, or maybe the collective disapproval of his behaviour towards Sita, expressed by every section of his supporters, made him bow, he agreed to bring Sita with him.

Now he was lost in his preoccupations with the affairs of state and the preparation for his coronation. All his new friends—Hanuman, Sugriv, Angad, Vibhishan, and a host of others were still with him. The friends departed after the celebrations were over. If the doubt in Ram's mind about Sita's character and chastity did not arise again by itself, loose talk of the people of Ayodhya must have revived it. However much the people of Ayodhya admired Ram for the heroic action of vanquishing Ravan, and whatever sympathies they had had with him for his earlier banishment, it is clear they were not charitably inclined towards Sita. She was after all a woman, a chattel, property of man, according to the social laws of that day.

Ram too was a part of that society. His mental makeup was conditioned by its thinking. A slightest lapse on the part of a woman, even if she might have been an unwilling agent in it, was unpardonable. Ram could be magnanimous enough in re-establishing the lost prestige of Ahalya—she was not his wife, but when it came to his own wife, he faltered. "Many are adept in the art of sermonizing others," says Tulsidas, "but the men who act according to their own sermons, are scarce."

SITA'S SORROWS

THE STORY OF the *Uttarkand* of the Valmiki *Ramayan*, the third part of the Ram story, is the story of Sita's sorrows. Sita's sorrows start from the time when she was abducted. They reach a climax when she is exiled by Ram. Valmiki was fully conscious of the sorrows of women whom he symbolized in Sita. Valmiki's Lakshman is not in agreement with Ram's decision to exile Sita. All the same following the orders of his elder brother, he takes Sita near the Valmiki Ashram to abandon her there. There, the sorrowing he gathers courage to tell Sita that now she will never return to Ayodhya, as Ram for the sake of his prestige has exiled her, and he turns back. But Sita, whose whole life, but for a brief span, has been one of sorrow, knows what this "prestige" means. Valmiki, the great poet, has concentrated all his sympathy for women, for Sita, in the one sarcastic *Shlok* which he puts in the mouth of Sita at that time. Sita calls Lakshman back and says: 'I am pregnant. See this, Lakshman, before you go back, so that my lord may not be abused for this too.'

Valmiki says: "Lakshman felt miserable to have heard this." (*Uttarkand*, Canto 8, *Shlok* 19.)

Lakshman comments upon Ram's exiling of Sita thus: "To exile Sita at such a time (when she is pregnant) is an irregular and cruel act. To exile Sita on some remarks from the city people who speak against justice, will finish Ram's prestige for-

ever. No one has ever gained any prestige by abandoning a devoted wife. What dharm has Ram gained by this action?" (*Uttarkand*, Canto 50, *Shloks* 7-8.)

"Only women can realize and re-live the experiences and feelings of Sita," says Mr. C. Rajagopalachari, in the Epilogue of his *Ramayan*. (published by Bharatiya Vidya Bhawan). "The story of Sita as told by Valmiki and Kamban can be appreciated fully only by women. Only they can fully appreciate the courage of Jatayu and the prowess of Hanuman. Sita's sorrows have not ended with the *Ramayan*. They go on, still in the lives of our women.

"I have followed the story of the prince of Ayodhya as told by Valmiki. There was a legend current among people, I think even before Valmiki's time, that after recovering Sita, for fear of scandal Ram sent her away to live in the forest.

"This pathetic episode must have sprung from the sorrow-laden imagination of our women. It has taken shape as the *Uttarkand*, of *Ramayan*. Although there is beauty in the *Uttarkand*, I must say my heart rebels against it. Valmiki had disposed of this old legend through the fire-ordeal in the battlefield. Even that ordeal does not seem to me as consistent with Ram's character. It is painful to read it.

"As the prince returned from Mithila he met Parsuram. I have heard it said that with that meeting Parsuram's Avatar came to an end. Likewise, it should be held, I think, that Ram's Avatar came to an end with the slaying of Ravan. After that battle Ram remained only as a king of the Ikshavaku race.

"On this theory, Ram's treatment of Sita after the battle and in the *Uttarkand* can be explained simply as the behaviour of a king in accordance with the customs of the times.

"But, how can we comment on a work composed thousands of years ago and coming down to us in palm-leaf manuscripts subject to corruption? If even after the fire-ordeal in the *Yuddhakand*, it is said in the *Uttarkand* that Sita was sent to the forest, we may take it that it mirrors the

voiceless and endless suffering of our women-folk. Sorrow and joy are both alike the play of God. God himself took with him his divine spouse, the embodiment of his own supreme compassion, into the world of men and women and enacted with her a great drama of joy and sorrow in the *Ramayan*.

“One other point. In describing how Ravan carried off Sita, Kamban differs from Valmiki. In Kamban’s *Ramayan*, Ravan does not seize and carry Sita as Valmiki describes; without touching her he lifts her with the earth on which she stands. Kamban’s version is followed by most popular expositors because this version is less painful to our feelings.

“It is no sin or shame to an innocent woman if a villain behaves like a brute. But, mistakenly, we in this country look on the violence of a brute as causing a blemish to the woman’s purity. It is in deference to this wrong feeling that Kamban departed from Valmiki here.

“For the same reason, Tulsi relates that the Sita seized and carried off by Ravan was not the real Sita at all but a palpable image of hers left behind by the real Sita. Thus the story is told in all North India. During the fire-ordeal, it is the ‘maya’-Sita that disappears and the real Sita springs again and returns from the flames.”

Mahatma Gandhi, in a letter to Kasturba (published in the August 1957 issue of *Navneet*—a Hindi monthly magazine) says:

“Women have had to face injustice even from the days of Ramrajya. Only on a remark by a washerman, Ramchandraji abandoned his most faithful wife, Sita. He did this injustice to her even after testing her on fire. Sita was pregnant at that time, but Ramchandraji did not pay any heed to this. He even had no courage frankly to tell Sita that “I abandon you due to a remark from a washerman.” He, by deceit, got her abandoned in the jungle through Lakshman. This tradition of injustice to women is continuing to this day, and women bear it silently.”

RAM THE HUMAN BEING

NOW WE TAKE up a detailed discussion of various points that are raised in the poem. The first and foremost of these points is that the poem treats Ram as a human being. This is not an extraordinary feature of the poem. Valmiki himself has treated Ram as a human being. The scholars of Sanskrit literature are unanimous in saying that the Ram of the original Valmiki *Ramayan* is a human being.

Dr. Ram Kumar Verma, in his famous book *Hindi Sahitya Ka Alochanatmak Itihas* says'

"The attitude of the *Valmiki Ramayan* is secular. This is a great quality of the book, because only in this way can we grasp the reality behind religion. Due to its having nothing to do with religion, the book is devoid of blind faith and emotionalism. Hence through this book we can understand religion from a secular point of view. Ram is a human being from the beginning to the end, he has not even a shadow of godhood. He is a noble person all right, but not an incarnation. Valmiki *Ramayan* recognizes only Vedic gods, among whom Indra holds a slightly higher place...In the Valmiki *Ramayan* there is no connection between Ram and Vishnu nor does Ram appear in the form of an incarnation. He is only a man, a great soul, a *dhiroddat* hero."

One or two quotations from the Valmiki *Ramayan* itself

will not be out of place here.

RAM (to SITA) “O Sita, look, whatever it is expected of a man to do away an insult, I have done.”

RAM (to SITA) “Your abduction by Ravan was an insult to me. That insult has been wiped away by a man like me.”

Dr. Rangeya Raghav says:

“In the whole Ramopakhyān of *Mahabharat* (Van Parv) Ram has never been treated as God. He is not an incarnation. He is only a brave person. Nobody is said to have reached heaven by being killed by him.” *Prachin Bharatiya Parampara Aur Itihas*.

Not only that the scholars do not consider Ram an Avatar they do not consider him even a perfect, faultless person. They find some blemishes in him, and think that it is in this way that Ram becomes a likable character.

Dr. Mataprasad Gupt, Reader in the Hindi Department, Allahabad University, discussing Ram's character as in Tulsidas's *Ramcharit Manas* says:

“There are two episodes which do not fit in with the greatness of this (Ram's), character (1) disfiguring Surpnakha, and (2) killing Bali through deceit. But some people do try to justify both the actions, completely. However, it is perhaps necessary to point out that the objections raised in these connections are from the point of view of morality, while we are concerned with these actions of the hero from a literary point of view, too, that is, how far do these blemishes prove helpful in enhancing the beauty of this poem (Tulsi's *Ramcharit Manas*). It seems that such blemishes bring the otherwise divine character of Ram to the ordinary level of humanity. Hence, the best thing is that these episodes remain as they are in this story.” (Tulsidas)

The Akhil Bharat Sarv Seva Sangh have published a book *Vinoba And His Mission* by Mr. Suresh Ram, an active colleague of Acharya Vinoba. The book gives authoritative versions of Acharya Vinoba's speeches. Starting from page 171, Mr Suresh Ram writes:

“In a speech at Morappur on 1st August, 1956, Vinoba dwelt on the subject (of controversy about the *Ramayan*) and answered

some criticisms levelled against it. Discarding the view that the *Ramayan* is a tale of the victory of North India over South, he said:

“ ‘The second objection is that the life of the hero of this great epic is not without some blemish. He is not the ideal man. He has not been able to maintain the ideal conduct all through the story. He is guilty of some serious lapses. To this I would say that it is possible to rewrite the *Ramayan* and depict the hero as a perfect man. After all it is not a book of history. It is a fiction. So any one can have the freedom to use his imagination and depict the hero wholly after his own heart...’ ”

“Later, he made an appeal not to quarrel or fight over the book but use it as a guide for self-purification:

“ ‘Hindu religion is eclectic. It has no particular book. It gives you the complete freedom to discard the *Ramayan* if you dislike it. You are welcome to read another book which you may like. This is the characteristic of Hinduism. One will not find such breadth of outlook in any other religion. No Christian will ever tell you to leave the Bible and choose another book. You are not a Christian if you do not accept the Bible. The same is true of Islam. But Hinduism gives you complete freedom. You can choose any book you like. It does not even insist on a belief in God as a precondition. When our religion gives us such complete freedom there is no room for petty rivalry and quarrels. All that is necessary is that man should earnestly strive to better himself and realize himself fully. Purification of the heart and mind is the essence of religion. We read the *Ramayan* because it helps us to purify our hearts. It is only a means. There is absolutely no reason for us to fight over it.’ ”

A sizeable section of the Hindus does not believe in the theory that God can incarnate Himself. To this section God is absolute, omnipresent, limitless and invisible: it is impossible for Him to restrict Himself in a visible and limited body. Swami Dayanand in his *Satyarth Prakash* writes:

“QUESTION: We too know that God has no form. But is this, too, incorrect that He assumed the bodies of Shiv, Vishnu, Ganesh, Surya, Devi, etc. and incarnated Himself as Ram, Krishna, etc., and that His images are made from these forms?

“ANSWER: Yes, it is incorrect. In the Veds, He has been qualified by the adjectives like Unborn, Ever-living and Bodyless, also He has been said, in the Veds, to be free from birth and death and body. And even from logic God can never incarnate Himself, because how can He, who is present everywhere like the sky, endless and devoid of perceptions like pleasure, sorrow, sight, etc., come into the smallness of semen, womb and body? Only he can come and go who has localized existence. But to talk of the incarnations of One who is immovable, invisible, and without whom there is not even a single atom, is like to talk of seeing the grandson of a barren woman after getting her son married.”

Even if, for the sake of discussion, we imagine that the Ram of Valmiki is an Avatar, we have to keep this in our mind that an Avatar, till He is on this earth in the garb of an Avatar, has to behave like a human being, otherwise the purpose of his incarnating Himself will be frustrated: He will fail to achieve His ends.

Particularly about the Ram Avatar it is said that Ram did not know that he was an Avatar. Throughout the period of his incarnation, he behaved as a human being. Thus it would be permissible to depict him as thinking and acting like an ordinary man.

Mr. C. Rajagopalachari has said the following in this connection:

“In the Ram Avatar, Ram did not know that he was God incarnate. Krishna knew that he was an Avatar and acted accordingly. We should read the two stories with this difference in mind. The despair and grief that the man Ram experienced, Krishna never knew. When he sucked at the demon woman’s breast or was bound with a rope and thrashed for mischief, he cared not, nor grieved. Standing

weaponless in the battlefield, he led the warrior to destroy the wicked. In every episode of Krishna we see the difference between the two Avatars.”

RAM'S DOUBTS

AFTER THE TREATMENT of Ram as a man, the most important thing about this poem is that it shows a conflict in Ram's mind as regards the purity or unchastity of Sita. This has two or three manifestations in the poem:

a) Ram is not sure whether Sita was abducted by Ravan against her will, or whether she of her own accord eloped with him.

b) Ram is not sure whether Sita would have been able to save her chastity from the desires of Ravan.

c) Ram is not sure whether, even if she was unwillingly abducted by Ravan, Sita would have been able to resist the temptations of falling in love with handsome and brave Ravan and whether she has any soft corner for him in her heart even now.

Let us take all these issues one by one. But this should be emphasized that in all these cases Ram in the poem is only doubtful. There are just after the lines expressing Ram's doubts other lines in the poem which affirm Ram's faith in Sita. Never in our appreciation of this poem should we overlook this fact. In a psychological study such as this it is always the whole, the totality of the work, which counts. Also the meaning of the words should be carefully considered.

If hastily we give wrong meanings or even slightly different meanings, then the whole context will be changed.

DID SITA ELOPE?

Every work of art has three individual factors which play very important roles. The three factors are:

1) The author, 2) the work of art, 3) the audience.

The author knows everything, he is present everywhere, he can see what is happening even in the mind of a character. He is aware of the past, present and future of every character, his motives, his desires, etc. He knows what the different characters are doing at a time, what is happening to them, and so on. The work is what it is made by the author. Its characters know only about their past, and about other characters they know only that which had happened before their eyes, or what they have been told about them. Beyond this they cannot know, they can at the best surmise what might have happened in their absence. The audience knows what it has been told by the author. It may try to surmise what is in the author's mind but it can never be sure.

Now let us look at what Ram says in *Ram Ka Antardwandwa* and how the Sita abduction scene is narrated by Valmiki.

In the poem *Ram Ka Antardwandwa* the lines from *Nahin Janta to Ya donon ka?* in the first stanza mean.

“I do not know how Ravan was able to carry her off. Who would tell me that she did not go with him of her own accord? I had run after Marich (the golden deer) only at her bidding, and afterwards she had made Lakshman follow me, when we came back, there was no trace of anybody. Who can say if it was only Ravan's deceit or of both?”

Valmiki describes the whole abduction scene like this:

Ram, Sita and Lakshman are sitting outside the hut. Sita sees the golden deer passing that way, and asks Ram to kill it for her. Ram agrees and follows the deer. When they have

gone a long way and Ram has hurt Marich, the latter cries, "Lakshman!" This cry is heard in the hut. Sita asks Lakshman to go and help Ram. Lakshman refuses to go as he has been ordered by his elder brother to look after Sita. Sita gets angry and alleges that Lakshman is not going to help Ram because he (Lakshman) wants to get Sita for himself. Still Lakshman declines to go, asserting that Ram could not be in any danger, and pointing out that the Rakshasas might be trying to hoodwink them.

"At this," says Valmiki, "Sita spoke still more pinching words to Lakshman who was telling the truth. Sita said: 'O un-Aryan! O merciless! O cruel! O blemish on your family! I think you intensely desire the destruction of Ram. You are talking like this because you want him to perish. Lakshman, I do not find anything to wonder at in what you have been talking. For such cruel and deceitful friends as you are, can behave only like this. You are very wicked. You have come alone with us (Sita and Ram) either with the desire of getting me or as an agent of Bharat. Lakshman, you may note it very well that the base desires of yours or Bharat can never be fulfilled. After having been the wife of Ram, who has dark colour like the blue lotus, and eyes like the petals of lotus flower, I will never become a wife to a mean person like you. I will die before your very eyes. I will not live for a moment on being separated from Ram.'

"Hearing these harsh words from Sita, Lakshman, the lord of his senses, said, folding his hands: 'O Devi, you are my goddess, so I cannot reply befittingly to all you have said. O Princess from Mithila, all the undeserved things that you have said regarding me, have not surprised me, because I know such is the nature of women. Women by nature are irreligious, fickle, cruel, and the root of disharmony. O daughter of Janak, your mean allegations are unbearable to me. Your words have pained my ears like red-hot arrows. May all the living things in this jungle bear me witness. O Sita, I had told you what was only most reasonable. But

you paid me back in a very hard-hitting manner. Shame on you! You are doubting me! It seems some great danger is approaching you. You are doubting me who am only following the orders from my elder brother who is facing great difficulties due to the wicked nature of women! Well, now I go to Ram, may good fortune befall you. O big-eyed Sita, may the forest-gods of this jungle defend you. I am seeing many ill-omens. Shall I be able to see you when I come back with Ram?"

"On hearing Lakshman speak thus, Sita started weeping. Her eyes filled with tears, she said, 'Lakshman, if Ram dies, I will drown myself in the Godavari, I will hang myself, I will jump from a high cliff, I will take some deadly poison, or I will burn myself. But in no case will I touch any man even with my feet, excepting Ram.'

"Sorrowing Sita, thus, abused Lakshman and beat her breast. When Lakshman saw the big-eyed Sita weeping so disconsolately, he asked her to take courage. But Sita said nothing to Lakshman, the younger brother of her husband. At this Lakshman saluted her by folding his palms and bowed and went towards Ram. As he went he turned many times to look towards Sita."

Now enters Ravan in the garb of a *sannyasi*. Seeing the beautiful Sita, he is overpowered by his desires for her. He chants some *Ved-mantras* and then starts praising the great beauty of Sita. Then he suggests that Sita should not live in such a jungle, but in some rich palace. Sita welcomes the *sannyasi* and gives him something to eat. Then she tells him about herself and her family, and asks about him. Ravan discloses his identity to her, and asks her to come with him. Sita expresses her devotion to Ram and refuses. Ravan forcibly lifts her and takes her away by the sky route. Sita cries, and calls every element to witness that she is being forcibly abducted. On the way she sees Jatayu...

In the above scene, as described by Valmiki, there no one is overlooking to know actually what is taking place in the

hut. Valmiki knows that Ravan has forcibly taken Sita away. We as the audience know actually what happened there. But Ram and Lakshman who are absent know nothing about it, nor do they have anybody to describe to them the actual scene. What Ram knows is that Sita first sent him away, then she forced Lakshman to follow him. The allegations she made against Lakshman only show her eagerness to get him out of her way. We know that Sita is not a member of any conspiracy, but all the same Sita's position is very weak. She can never explain the genesis of the wild allegations she made against Lakshman and when later on doubt in her character enters the mind of Ram, she will not be able to clear herself as far as he is concerned. Also after a lapse of time, when Ram, in a doubtful mood, reconstructs the whole scene he will not be able to decide what is what.

It is only in this context that we have to look at the reference to this episode in *Ram Ka Antardwandwa*.

Immediately after the reference in the poem to Sita's abduction, Ram is reminded of Ravan's prowess and experiences a sense of elation at his having conquered him. Ram attempts a comparison between himself and Ravan, and in a bid to find an easy way to the confirmation of his doubts, he gives all the benefits to Ravan. He calls Ravan beautiful (many versions of Ramayan, including the important ones like those of Kamban and Michael Madhusudan Datt, have described Ravan as a beautiful person), he imagines the romantic atmosphere of the Ashok Vatika of Lanka, and then puts the vital question: "Might not have Sita yielded even once in some tender moment? Who knows what might not have happened then in Lanka?" This is the question which is rankling in his heart, which as he later on says in the poem has cost him "my peace of the mind, taste of the tongue, sleep of the eye, and the song of ear."

But even the putting of the question revolts his heart. He terms the suggestion implied in the question as a "dirty fancy of

my mind,” and asserts, “Sita would never yield, rather die.”

He, then, tries to answer the question indirectly. He cites the examples of many renowned sages who had fallen victim to the sex-urge. He gets desperate, reckless. Anything which would confirm his doubts is welcome now, because this is the only way open now to the peace of his mind. Even a gross accusation against himself will do. But we see later in the poem that the required confirmation does not come. To the last what he is able to say is that he is in doubt and wants to escape the dire agony of being in doubt. That is why he decides to remove Sita from his proximity.

So in this connection what we have to examine is this: “Could Ram doubt Sita’s chastity?”

Already we have classified this doubt in two forms: 1) whether Sita was able to save her chastity from the desires of Ravan, and 2) whether Sita would have been able to resist the temptations of her own mind.

Now we take them up, one by one.

COULD SITA ESCAPE RAVAN?

That Ram doubted whether Sita would have been able to save her chastity from the desires of Ravan is clear from all the important versions of ‘*Ramayan*’. Only one lengthy quotation from the Valmiki *Ramayan* will be enough here. Valmiki lays the scene just after Ram’s victory over Ravan. Vibhishan brings Sita before Ram... But let us describe it in the words of Valmiki himself:

(From *Yuddhakand*, Canto 117, *Shlok* 15 onwards)

“Vibhishan brought Sita where Ram was. At that time Ram was lost in thought. Even then Vibhishan informed him about Sita’s arrival. Hearing that Sita, who had lived in the house of the lord of Rakshasas for quite a long time, had come, the feelings of anger, happiness and misery appeared together on Ram’s face, he was not particularly pleased with the coming of Sita. He addressed Vibhishan,

who was standing nearby, thus, in a pensive mood: 'O gentle one! Bring Sita soon before me.'

"On being thus ordered by Ram, Vibhishan made an effort to vacate the crowded place. The Rakshas warriors, wearing kurta and pagri, and having sticks in their hands, started to remove the monkeys, the bears and the Rakshasas from there. The armies of the monkeys, the bears and the Rakshasas went far away from there immediately on being ordered to vacate the place. The noise which was made in the process was like the roaring made by sea waves as they rise under the pressure of air. The people who were being removed from there got confused. Seeing this, Ram, in his generosity and anger, asked them to stop. Ram, his eyes burning red with anger, complained thus to Vibhishan:

" 'Vibhishan, why are you troubling these people, without asking me? These are my own people, hence, stop this irregularity just now. Home, clothes, walls, etc., are not proper veils for woman, nor is it a veil to remove the people who are engaged in honouring their king. A woman's true veil is in her good character. And, moreover, in the times of difficulty, in pain, in war, swayambara, yajna and on the occasion of a marriage ceremony, it is not bad for woman to come openly before everyone. This is an occasion of great sorrow. On such an occasion it will not be improper for Sita to come openly before everyone. Hence, bring Sita here on foot, and not in the palaki, so that the monkeys may see her.'

"On Ram's order, sorrowing Vibhishan went up to the palaki and brought Sita. Lakshman, too, with Sugriv and Hanuman, felt unhappy over this order. From this attitude of Ram people surmised that Ram had no need for his wife and was very angry with her.

"After alighting from the palaki, Sita shrinking and trying to hide herself within her own body, followed Vibhishan closely and reached near her husband. Sita, who took her husband to be her only god, covered her face with a cloth, in

modesty, looked at her husband with wonder, delight and love. Then she addressed him as *Aryaputra* and started crying miserably. On seeing the long-awaited full-moon-like face of her dear husband Sita forgot her sorrows. Her face became bright like spotless moon.

(Continued in Canto 118)

“On seeing Sita near him Ram started expressing the feelings of his heart. He said, ‘O gentle woman, by killing the enemy in war I have freed you. I have accomplished all that is expected to be accomplished by prowess. Now my anger is pacified. The insult which Ravan had flung at me has been fully revenged. In the war I have destroyed that insult and the perpetrator of that insult together. Today my prowess has become known, today my efforts have borne fruit, today I am absolved of my vow. Today I have regained my influence. The deceitful Ravan had abducted you from the Ashram in my absence. This happened only due to the displeasure of the gods. Even that displeasure of the gods has been removed by me—a man. The manhood of that person has no meaning who cannot do away with an insult by his prowess.

“The crossing of the sea, the burning of Lanka, and other admirable feats accomplished by brave Hanuman have become successful today. The brave deeds of monkey-king Sugriv, his proper advice from time to time, the effort of war with the help of his army—all this has become successful today. The aim of Vibhishan, who came to me considering his brother Ravan in the wrong, has been achieved today.

“Sita again started weeping to hear Ram talk thus. When Ram’s eyes fell on Sita, his anger was suddenly multiplied, just as fire flares up when ghee is poured into it. Sitting among those monkeys and Rakshasas, Ram frowned and said these harsh words to Sita:

“ ‘What a man can do to revenge himself upon his enemy, that I have done by killing Ravan. This has restored my

prestige. Just as God Agastya had conquered the South by the power of his penance, by killing Ilwal and Bilwal, so have I done by freeing you. May good fortune befall you. The killing of many brave Rakshas warriors for you has been done by me with the help of my friends. But I did not make this effort for your sake. I have conquered Lanka with the help of my friends to save my honour, to remove ill-fame from the name of my illustrious clan, to escape from public censure.

“ ‘But you have lived for a long time in the house of Ravan, so I have started doubting your character. Therefore, standing before me, you are as unbearable to me as a lighted lamp is to a man suffering from eye-sore. Hence, O Sita, go wherever you like. I can have no relations with you in future. No man, who is born in an illustrious family, will accept with a loving heart a woman who has lived in another man’s house. O Sita, at the time of abducting you Ravan lifted you in his lap and looked at you with ill-intentioned eyes, so how can I, who belong to a great clan, accept you? By killing Ravan I have freed you from him. I have gained that glory for which I tried to get you back. Now, I have nothing to do with you. Go, wherever you like. O gentle woman, this I have said after due consideration. Lakshman, Bharat, Sugriv and Vibhishan—go and live with any one of them for whomever you may have any liking, or go anywhere else where you may expect happiness. O Sita, having seen your divine beauty, when you lived in his house, Ravan would not have been able to suppress his sex-urge.’

“Sita who had been for a long time expecting to hear honourable and loving words from her husband, heard these unpleasant words and felt miserable like a creeper destroyed by an elephant. She shivered and shed tears.

“Sita felt great sorrow on hearing these hair-raising, angry and harsh words of Ram, she had never before heard such things spoken in such an assembly. When she heard such things from her husband sitting in the midst of

monkeys and Rakshasas, Sita shrank within herself. Being pained by the sharp arrows of words uttered by Ram, Sita shrank within herself and shed tears. Then wiping her tears, she spoke, sobbing:

“ ‘O brave one, why are you uttering like common men these cold words which are unworthy of being heard, and pierce ears? My lord, such things are said by mean men for their mean wives. O long-armed one, all the things which you have thought about me, are meaningless, because I am not like that. I say this on oath that I am pure in my heart. Please do believe me. O lord, if these things have come into your mind by observing the characters of wicked women, then remove these things from your heart. You have already tested me.

“ ‘When Ravan touched my body, I was helpless. He did not touch me with my consent. It was so willed by Divine Powers. I am blameless. My heart, which is in my control, is still devoted to you. I have no powers over my body, for being a weak woman I could not defend it. So I am blameless. I have lived with you from my very childhood. If you cannot recognize my ever-growing love for you after such a long period of our living together, then I am perished. Nobody can save me now.

“ ‘O lord of my heart, why did you not abandon me when you sent brave Hanuman to see me in Lanka? O powerful one, by hearing of your abandoning me from this monkey, I would have committed suicide. After my death you need not have come here with your friends, and would have been spared the danger to your life and the effort of waging such a difficult war. O king, you are overpowered by anger like an ordinary man, considering me to be an ordinary woman. You have failed to understand my character. I am born of Mother Earth and have been brought up by Janak—this you have not at all considered. You married me in my childhood, and since then I have been with you—you have now forgotten even this. How much do I love you—this too

you do not know. You have forgotten my modesty and love.’”

Some of the salient features of the above quotation may be summarily put like this:

i) That Ram expresses a definite doubt in Sita's chastity and fears it might have been violated in Lanka.

ii) That Ram has started doubting Sita's character too.

iii) That he does not want to live with Sita in future.

iv) That Sita considers it necessary to explain that Ravan had abducted her against her will.

v) That Sita asserts that even if her body was defiled by Ravan her heart was still devoted to Ram.

vi) That Ram (though this is not in connection with the point immediately under discussion) considers himself a man.

vii) That Vibhishan, Lakshman, Sugriv, Hanuman, etc., were not pleased with Ram's attitude towards Sita.

Since quite a lengthy quotation from the Valmiki Ramayan has been given in support of the contention that Ram could doubt that Sita's chastity might have been violated in Lanka, we shall give only one more quotation in this connection. This is from Mahabharat. The *Ramopakhyan* in the *Van Parv* of Mahabharat gives a brief story of Ram's exploits till his coronation in Ayodhya. Dr Rangeya Raghav, in his famous book, *Prachin Bharatiya Parampara Aur Itihas*, has quoted the relevant passage like this:

“Doubting Sita's character, Ram said: ‘I have done my duty by freeing you from the Rakshas. Now you may go wherever you like. How can a man like me keep a woman with him, who has lived with another man. O daughter of Janak, you may be pure or not, but I cannot accept you just as I cannot accept the pious food which has been touched by a dog.’”

COULD SITA FALL?

Now let us look into the third proposition, that Ram could doubt that Sita might not have been able to resist the temptations of her own heart.

Among the quotations given above, one gives us an idea of the views held by the men of the Raghu clan about women. These views are expressed by no less a person than Lakshman himself—the illustrious brother and inseparable companion of Ram. Lakshman tells Sita: “Women are by nature irreligious, fickle, and cruel.” This was the standard by which Lakshman tried to judge Sita before she was abducted. Naturally, the same standard, with a greater force, would be applied after her abduction.

When people talked about Sita’s living in Lanka and hinted at her unchastity, they must have talked about her possible love for Ravan. When people talk it is difficult to limit the flights of their fancy. All these talks must have been reported to Ram.

Even otherwise Ram was a part of society in which he lived. There could not be much difference in the thinking of Lakshman and Ram. Ram too must have considered women “by nature fickle.” Sita was just another woman.

But this line of argument, it may be said, is based on assumptions. So let us quote from Dr Kamil Bulke’s book *Ramkatha*, to show from the various versions of *Ramayan*, why Ram exiled Sita. Some of these versions not only show that Ram doubted Sita’s chastity, they also assert that Ram was sure of Sita’s unchastity and feared she might have fallen in love with Ravan.

Here it is:

“The plot of the Tibetan *Ramayan* seems to have been developed from *Katha Saritsagar* and *Bhagwat Puran*. It also shows the obvious signs of being influenced by folklore. Ram overhears a man quarrelling with his wanton wife. The husband says: ‘You are not like other women.’ At this the wife replies: ‘What do you know about women? Look at Sita, she has lived for one lakh years with Ravan, and yet Ram has accepted her.’ On hearing this a doubt about Sita arises in the mind of Ram. He stealthily meets that woman.

Explaining the nature of women, she tells Ram:

“ ‘Even as a fevered man always remembers the cold waters of a river.

A woman, for ever troubled by the sex-urge, always thinks of beautiful men.

Till when someone sees her or hears her, a woman does not behave in a scandalous manner.

But in seclusion, when she is under nobody's sway, she takes even a stranger to satisfy her sex-urge.’

“After hearing this the doubts of Ram are confirmed. On reaching home he orders Sita to go anywhere else. Sita, with her two sons, leaves for some Ashram.

“In this description a new cause, besides the washerman's censure, has been put forth: Ram's doubt in Sita.

“The story of Ravan's portrait has gained great popularity...from Gujarat to Bengal, and from Kashmir to Ceylon, it has spread all over India...

“The story of Hemchandra's *Sita Banvas* episode (12th century) is like this:

“After Sita became pregnant her three rival-wives became even more jealous of her. Unable to resist the insistent requests from these three, Sita draws a picture of Ravan's feet, saying: this ‘I have never seen Ravan in the face.’ After this the rival wives show this picture to Ram and spread the news among public. A short while after this citizens come to Ram and mention the public censure (of Sita) to him. That very night Ram tours the city in disguise and hears himself being censured due to Sita. As a result the next day he orders Sita to be abandoned in the jungle...

“In the Bengali Ramayan, written by Krittivas in the 15th century, some friends of Sita get curious and ask Sita to draw a portrait of Ravan. Sita draws a portrait of Ravan on the floor of her room and after the friends depart, she sleeps, being tired, near the portrait. Ram comes and sees this. He doubts Sita and exiles her. In the Bengali Ramayan of Chandravati (16th century) and in *Seri Ram* of Malaya,

Kubua (Kibui in Malaya)—the daughter of Kaikeyi— inveigles Sita into drawing a portrait of Ravan. Later on Kubua places the portrait on the breast of sleeping Sita and calls Ram there. *Seri Ram* mentions this too that after the exiling of Sita Kibui Devi and all the animals became dumb for twelve years.

“In the Kashmiri Ramayan, a real sister of Ram has been mentioned in place of Kubua. In the folk songs too a sister-in-law of Sita asks her to draw the portrait of Ravan. In the Gujarati Ramayan, written by Narmad, Ram stealthily watches Sita drawing the portrait of Ravan.

“In *Serat Kand* of Java, Kaikeyi herself draws a portrait of Ravan on the fan of Sita and places it on the bed of sleeping Sita. In *Anand Ramayan* too Kaikeyi requests Sita to draw the portrait of Ravan. ‘I have seen only the big toe of his right foot,’ replies Sita, and draws a picture of it on the wall. Afterwards Kaikeyi draws a full portrait of Ravan on it, and calling Ram, she tells him this, criticizing the nature of women:

‘Wherever the heart of a woman is, she in her mind always remembers him,

Who can know the nature of a woman, even gods like Shiv have been only charmed by women.’ (5; 1, 46)

“Hearing this Ram assures Kaikeyi that the very next day Lakshman would leave Sita in a jungle and would bring her right arm back to Ayodhya.

“*Seri Ram* and *Serat Kand* of Indonesia have already been mentioned. We find a slightly different form of the Ravan’s portrait story in *Hikayat Maharaj Ravan* of that country. Seven months have elapsed since Ram is living in Lanka after killing Ravan. A daughter of Ravan has a portrait of her dear father, which she places on the breast of sleeping Sita. When Ram comes, Sita in her sleep, is seen kissing this portrait. Enraged Ram flogs Sita, cuts off her hair, calls Lakshman and orders him to kill her and to bring to him her heart in proof of the deed. Lakshman takes Sita away. He

sends Sita to her parents, kills a goat and assures Ram that it is Sita who has been killed. It is evident that such an exaggerated form of the story can be available only where the ideal of Ram has become weakened.

“There is another, final form of the Ravan’s portrait story available, which has an element of the supernatural in it. In the Ramayan popular in Ceylon, Uma visits Sita and asks her to draw a portrait of Ravan on a banana tree leaf. When Ram comes there all of a sudden, they hide the portrait under the cot. Ram sits on the cot, but the cot starts shivering. Ram gets furious on knowing the cause of it and orders his brothers to kill Sita. Lakshman colours his sword with some animal’s blood in the jungle and assures Ram that Sita has been killed.

“In *Ream Ker*, a Yakshini appears in the garb of a friend of Sita and makes her draw the portrait of Ravan. Later on she incarnates herself in the picture. Thus Sita cannot rub out the picture even after great efforts. Disappointed, Sita hides the picture under the cot. Later on Ram lies down on this cot and catches fever. When he comes to know of the portrait he orders Sita to be killed and her heart to be brought to him as a proof of the killing.

“In *Ram Jatak* and *Ram Kiyen* is available a description resembling the one in *Ream Ker* mentioned just above. According to *Ram Kiyen*, a daughter of Surpnakha, named Adul, makes Sita draw the picture of Ravan, and later on enters the picture which now cannot be rubbed out by Sita. Later on Lakshman brings the heart of a dog and assures Ram that Sita has been killed.”

Among the versions mentioned in the above quotation are Krittivas’s and Chandravati’s Bengali Ramayan which are as popular, if not more, in Bengal, as Tulsi’s *Manas* in Hindi-speaking areas. Narmad’s Gujarati Ramayan and the Kashmiri Ramayan are equally popular in their respective areas. Moreover the testimony of the folk songs which too mention the portrait-of-Ravan story is infallible. Folk songs

are the crystallized shape of popular beliefs.

None of these versions implies any unchastity on Sita's part, but they do pinpoint the fact that a vast number of people accept the theory that Ram exiled Sita because at the time of exiling her he was convinced of her unchastity.

The poem *Ram Ka Antardwandwa* on the other hand, shows Ram only in doubt. He is never sure. That there was a doubt in Ram's mind and he insisted on Sita proving her chastity to the very end, is clear from another episode in the Valmiki Ramayan. The occasion is a yajna being performed by Ram, in the far end (Cantos 95, 96, 97) of the *Uttarkand*:

"Ramchandra, with the sages and the monkeys, thus heard the epic (written by Valmiki, and sung by Lav and Kush) for many days. When the *Uttarkand* was being narrated, it became clear that the singers were the twins born to Sita.

"Then Ramchandra asked some wise and swift messengers to go to Valmiki and tell him on his behalf: 'If Sita is pure and blameless, then order her to come in our court and publish her innocence,' and then to return back after ascertaining the response of the sage and Sita's intention. Ram said: 'Let the daughter of Janak take the vow of her purity in our court, tomorrow in the morning.'

"Accordingly the messengers reached the Ashram of sage Valmiki. There they saluted the great sage, and gave him the sweet message from Ram. Maharshi Valmiki, understanding the purpose of Ram, said, 'May good fortune befall you. Sita will do as Ramchandra desires, because the husband is a woman's only God.'

"Hearing this the messengers went back to Ramchandra and told him what the sage had told them. Ramchandra was highly pleased and addressed the assembly of kings and sages thus: 'Now all the kings and sages, with their servants and disciples, will witness the oath of Sita.' The sages acclaimed the announcement, and the kings said, 'O king, there is none else but you who would act like this.'

“At the rising of the new day, Ramchandra went to the yajrashala and called all the sages there. Among the sages who driven by their curiosity came there, were Vashishth, Vamdev, Jabali, Kashyap, Vishwamitra, Deerghatama, Durvasa, Pulastya, Shakti, Bhargav, Vaman, aged Markandeya, highly famous Moudgalya, Garg, Chyavan, Shatanand, Bharadwaj, Suprabh and the son of Agni, Narad, Parvat, renowned Gautam, katyayan, Suyajna, Agastya.

“Many strong-bodied Rakshasas, brave monkeys and other great sages came there, being curious. Thousands of Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras, and the learned Brahmins of many lands came there to witness the oath of Sita. To witness the oath of Maharani Sita there came numerous learned persons, tapasvis and yogis. All of them came and sat in the assembly motionless like statues.

“Maharani Sita came there thinking of Ramchandra in her heart. Her eyes were full of tears. Her head was bent low. She was following Valmiki very closely. People saw Sita come behind Valmiki as pure Shruti follows Brahma and they were moved the whole assembly started talking. Some praised Ram, other praised Sita, and still others praised Ram and Sita both, thus a huge noise was made there.

“After coming in that assembly, sage Valmiki addressed Ramchandra thus : ‘O Ramchandra the son of Dasharath, Sita is a religious-minded woman. She adheres to the religion of complete devotion to the husband (*pativratdharm*). She was left near my Ashram because of public censure. O Ramchandra, you were afraid of public censure. Now order Sita that she may convince you of her chastity. Both these handsome lads are thee sons of Sita. They have taken birth from you. This I am telling you truthfully. O descendant of great Raghu, I am the tenth son of Varun. I have never told a lie so far. I tell you truly that these two lads are your own sons. If there be even so little a blemish in the purity of Sita, may I forego the fruit of my thousand-years’ tapasya. If Sita is without any blemish, if I have never

committed a sin, I may get the fruits of my tapasya. O Ramchandra, by the five senses and mind, I have known Sita to be pure, that is why I took her to my Ashram. She is fully devoted to her husband, and is pure and sinless. You are afraid of public censure. Sita will convince you of her purity. O king of men, I have seen the purity of Sita with my divine eyes. You too consider her to be pure, but your heart has been darkened with the fear of public censure. That is why you exiled her.

“On seeing Sita standing in the crowded assembly, and on hearing Valmiki speak like this, Ramchandra folded the palms of his hands, and said, ‘O the knower of true religion, what you say is correct. I believe in your pious words. After my conquering Lanka, Sita had taken an oath, calling all the Gods to her witness. That is why, I, taking her to be pure, brought her with me to Ayodhya. Even then, fearing public censure, I exiled her. Please forgive this sin of mine...”

And again after this Ram asks Sita to prove her chastity. Not knowing how to do it, Sita takes a vow that she has been pure, and not desiring to come back to Ram now, enters the Mother Earth.

ATTACK ON LANKA

ANOTHER POINT made in the poem is that Ram did not attack Lanka for the sake of Sita. An English translation of these lines would read like this: "But when did I kill Ravan for the sake of Sita? The abduction of Sita was an insult to me and my manhood—I had to take revenge and re-establish my honour, and the Aryans had to be spread on the Rakshasas lands. Sita was an excuse."

In this connection let us first of all consider some quotations from the Valmiki Ramayan itself. In these quotations, Ram tells Sita the reasons which made him wage the war against Ravan.

RAM (to SITA): "O gentle woman, by the killing of enemy in war, I have freed you. I have accomplished all that is expected to be accomplished by prowess. Now my anger is pacified. The insult which Ravan had flung at me has been fully revenged. In the war, I have destroyed that insult and the perpetrator of that insult together. Today my prowess has become known, today my efforts have borne fruit, today I am absolved of my vow. Today I have regained my influence...What a man can do to revenge himself upon an enemy, that I have done. This has restored my prestige. Just as god Agastya had conquered the South by the power of his penance, by killing Ilwal and Bilwal, so

have I done by freeing you. May good fortune befall you. The killing of many brave Rakshas warriors for you, has been done by me with the help of my friends. But I did not make this effort for your sake. I have conquered Lanka with the help of my friends to save my honour, to remove ill-fame from the name of my illustrious clan, and to escape from public censure...I have gained the glory for which I tried to get you back.”(Yuddhakand, Canto 118—already quoted in full.)

In the above quotation Ram has made himself very clear about his motives in attacking Lanka. Some of the relevant lines in the poem *Ram Ka Antardwandwa* seem as if they have been actually translated from Valmiki.

At another place in the Valmiki Ramayan, Ram tells Bali that he is wandering in the jungles to propagate his religion, i.e., the Aryan culture. Valmiki writes:

RAM (to BALI): “I and other Aryan kings roam on the earth to propagate our religion.” (*Kishkindhakand*, Canto 18, *Shlok* 9.)

Many scholars consider Ramayan as a story of the Aryan North India’s expansion over the non-Aryan South India. Mr. Chandrashekhar G. Bhide, in the *Inside Story Of The Human Race*, says this: “Ram stands in history of mankind as a mighty Aryan of western bronze era who did the supreme and tremendous self-deceptive and cunning sacrifice to behold the end of his own free imagination by conquest of southern India.”

Dr A. D. Pusalker, Assistant Director and Head of the Department of Sanskrit in Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, discussing the ‘Traditional History from the earliest Time to the Accession of Parikshit’ in “The History And Culture Of The Indian People, Part I, *The Vedic Age*” (edited by Dr K. M. Munshi) says:

“The story of Ram is particularly important as it brings south India in view for the first time...

“The story of Ram, divested of its miraculous,

fabulous, incredible and mythological elements, clearly indicates that he (Ram) was a great king who spread Aryan ideas and institutions into regions far and wide.”

RAM ASSUMES POSES

THERE IS a passage in the concluding portions of the poem *Ram Ka Antardwandwa* in which Ram says he has assumed many poses in his life. He cites the examples of his attack on Lanka in the name of Sita, his killing Bali from behind a hiding place, and his alluring of Vibhishan to give out the secrets of Ravan. He asks if all these were acts of justice. Then he concludes that his assuming another pose to exile Sita will not do any harm.

Before taking up an explanation of the point whether Ram could assume poses, it would be better to explain the meanings of the Hindi word *dhong*. *Dhong* means to show or assume a pose which is not real. It is also clear that in the disputed poem this word has been used in this very sense, because it appears in the same sense, at an earlier place also. Says Ram: "For the sake of religion and race I will have to curb my desires and assume many poses."

Now if we take, for a moment, the Ram of this poem to be an incarnation of God, his whole life is a pose. He is in fact a god, but for the purpose of achieving his aims, he calls himself a man.

But let us take example from the Valmiki Ramayan, and try to study where and how Ram assumed poses. This can be done without going into many details of Ram's life. Let

us take at first the instances enumerated by Ram in the disputed poem, and then give one or two more instances of other poses assumed by him.

ATTACK ON LANKA

Much has already been quoted in this connection when we discussed that Ram did not attack Lanka for the sake of Sita. In addition a quotation from Mr. Chandrashekhar Bhide (in full here) should suffice:

“Ram stands in history of mankind as a mighty Aryan of western bronze era who did the supreme and tremendous self-deceptive sacrifice to behold the end of his own free imagination by conquest of southern India. The whole episode of Sita’s abduction by Ravan, by the Black ruler of Lanka and the east-west-north Indian ocean, from near Nasik, Bombay, was planned by Ram’s ambitious step-mother. A word was sent to Ravan, who had friendly relations with the Aryan civilization in North India, about Ram’s going southwards. Now Ram had well learnt of his step-mother’s plan and he himself gave away Sita to Ravan at the latter’s heartfelt determination in Sita’s purity and dignity, which as he had imagined would keep the Black ruler away from her during their separation. Then, Ram cried and wept, went stricken with grief, remorse and sorrow and cried like a child over the loss of his dear one, Sita. Ram’s imagination, now, was thrown at his reunion with her. And yet he felt of her not being with him. And the man tracked southern hills, jungles, rivers and plains for fourteen years to reach Lanka, and the man had conquered south with imagination, compassion and tolerance and by cunning sacrifice and deception, and made friends of the so-called uncultured Dravidians. Then, Ram destroyed Lanka and Ravan, and found Sita. And Sita was yet pure and glamorous and Ravan had vainly worshipped her for fourteen years to make her change her mind about Ram and to forget him. Now the woman was dominant in affairs of

Blacks, fish-eaters, and Ravan was under the dominance of his wife, and Ram was cunning. And Ram was reunited with Sita amidst splendour and grandeur of his victorious conquest of South. So, Ram had seen his own imagination come true. The Black civilization was destroyed from the Indian ocean.” (*Inside History of the Human Race.*)

RAM AND BALI

According to the Valmiki ‘Ramayan’ and every other version of ‘Ramayan’ which has the Bali episode in it, Ram killed Bali from behind a tree, when Bali was fighting with Sugriv. When, in the Valmiki ‘Ramayan’, Bali accuses Ram of killing him through deceit, Ram explains that it all is in keeping with religion.

Valmiki writes (in *Kishkindhakand*, Canto 17 and 18):

“ ‘It is correct,’ said Bali to Ram, ‘that Sugriv will inherit my kingdom. But it is improper that you should have killed me against the dictates of religion. Brave men like me die only in their time. Nobody can kill them. Answer me: Is it correct to kill any one like this from a hiding place?’

“Bali, the son of Indra the god of gods, spoke thus, and looking towards Ram who was luminous like the sun, fell silent. His mouth had dried, and he was feeling great pain in the wound made by the arrow.

“Wounded Bali said these hard, beneficial and meek words which were fully in keeping with religion to Ram. On being thus reproached by Bali, who was like the sun without its glamour, like a cloud without water and like a quenched fire, Ram replied:

“ ‘O Bali, why are you babbling like a child when you do not know the propriety of the occasion, and the *dharm*, *arth* and *Kam*? Why do you want to sermonize me without first getting your doubts cleared by wise pundits? This earth full of hills and jungles is ruled by the kings of the Ikshavaku clan. Hence they have the right to show mercy and to punish all the animals, birds and men. This earth at present

is being ruled by King Bharat who is religious-minded, has taken the vow of the truth, is soft by nature, and knows *dharm*, *arth* and *Kam* very well. Only he shows mercy or punishes. The three qualities of policy, humility and truth are present in Bharat. He is a mighty person, and he fully understands the condition of time and place. I and the other kings who roam the whole earth to propagate our religion, follow his orders. How can any one act against the dictates of religion in the empire of such a great king? We, following the orders of Bharat, acting according to the dictates of religion, punish those who act against religion.' ”

Now, the poses that Ram assumes in this passage are:

(a) He is a roving ambassador of King Bharat, and it is his duty to punish evil-doers as he has been ordered by Bharat to do so. We know that Ram was actually banished from Ayodhya, and after the meeting in Chitrakut, Bharat was in Ayodhya only as a regent of Ram. The whole dialogue is a pose assumed by Ram.

(b) Killing Bali from a hiding place is a religious act.

Dr. Rangeya Raghav, in his book *Prachin Bharatiya Parampara Aur Itihas*, describing this episode as given in *Mahabharat*, writes:

“Bali approached Sugriv who stood on the Malyavan hillock. Sugriv said: ‘You have stolen my kingdom and my wife.’ Then both fought with stones and trees. This shows how much backward they were in the matter of social organization. Here Ram, to achieve his ends, killed Bali from a hiding place, with patent dishonesty.”

RAM AND VIBHISHAN

Again, Dr. Rangeya Raghav, in his book *Prachin Bharatiya Parampara Aur Itihas*, describing the scene when Vibhishan comes to Ram for the first time, in *Mahabharat*, writes:

“Here Vibhishan came—the traitor arrives.

“Sugriv doubted Vibhishan. He thought Vibhishan was a

spy of Ravan. But Ramchandra, after verifying the truth and designs of Vibhishan came to know that Sugriv's doubt was baseless. This description has no place for Ram's quality of supporting all those who came to seek refuge with him.

“Ram honoured Vibhishan in many ways, and recognized him as the king of all the Rakshasas and Lanka. Vibhishan was appointed friend and adviser to Lakshman. Here Ram employed the diplomatic policy of dividing.”

SITA AND THE WASHERMAN

IN ADHYATM RAMAYAN, Ram tells Sita: “I will create the myth of public-censure concerning you, and then will exile you like any other common man afraid of public censure. There in the Ashram of Valmiki you will give birth to two sons...”

According to this version, the whole episode of exiling Sita is a pose.

SOME OTHER POSES

According to Valmiki, when Surpnakha approaches Ram in his Ashram, he tells her:

“O lady, I am already married. This is my wife. It will be painful for a woman like you to live with a rival-wife. But, here is Lakshman, my younger brother. He has a good character, is beautiful, has a strong body, and, moreover, he is a bachelor. This young and beautiful brother of mine has never seen even the face of a woman, and he is in need of a female companion.”

Ram knows he is telling a lie. Lakshman has married Urmila, and, before coming to the jungles with Ram, has lived with her for twelve years. Is not this a pose, to say the least.

RAM AND SURPNAKHA

BEFORE GOING into the details of the various versions

of the Surpnakha episode in the various Ramayans, once again it must be stressed that no line in the disputed poem must be read in isolation. We must, at every stage, keep in our mind the critical moment in which Ram has been shown in the poem. It is a moment when a person's need for mental peace, for freedom from agonizing doubts becomes supreme and overthrows every other consideration. Anything to clutch at is most welcome in that moment of mental chaos.

In the poem, just before the lines where Ram refers to Surpnakha, Ram's heart has violently revolted at the suggestion of any failure on behalf of Sita to maintain her chastity in Lanka. But he rashly wants to justify his doubts which he, deep down in his heart, knows are baseless. First he makes a broad generalization about the supreme powers of the sex-urge. The examples of many sages flash in his mind. Thinking that it is not enough to convince him, in a masochistic mood, he tries to hurt himself. This might, he hopes, bring his doubts to some conclusion. He accuses himself of wavering on seeing Surpnakha's great beauty. But he fails in the attempt. Immediately he redeems himself by saying that he had only wavered, and that though in a weak moment even now he remembers the beauty of Surpnakha, he is always able to suppress his desires because he has a high sense of duty. Thus the doubt in his mind is left unresolved. He again experiences the great agony of living in doubts.

Most of the critics and scholars consider the Surpnakha episode, as described in the Valmiki Ramayan, as a blemish on Ram's character, and try to read many meanings in it.

Says Dr. Mataprasad Gupt, in his thesis, *Tulsidas*: "There are two episodes which do not fit in with the greatness of this great character (i.e. Ram) (1) the disfiguring of Surpnakha, and (2) the killing of Bali through deceit."

The propriety of Ram's joking in a ribald manner with

Surpnakha has also been questioned. Would an upright man, with nothing otherwise in his mind, ask a woman, who has openly come to him with such an invitation, to go to his younger brother. Ram does not refuse Surpnakha directly. He only says: "Of course, you would not like to share me with a rival-wife." Then, both Ram and Lakshman join the game and make Surpnakha fly like a shuttlecock from one end to the other.

The episode has been treated variously by various authors. In *Hanumannatak*, a 17th century Hindi translation of an original Sanskrit work of great antiquity, Surpnakha approaches Ram when the latter is with Sita. Ram falls in for the beauty of Surpnakha. It is Sita who checks him. Rendered into English the relevant passage may read like this:

"Ram spoke thus unto her (Surpnakha), 'Who art thou, O woman, who seemst to have come down to earth directly from heaven. Hast thou been, O woman, who looketh to be one from among Rambha, Urvashi, Menaka and Sukeshi, sent to me by Lord Indra? Why art thou wandering here without any friend? Tell me who are your father, mother and brother?'

"Then Sita said, 'Look, what knowledge you talk! To me she seems to be some trouble-shooter. Why do you encourage her!'

In *Bhattikavyam*, Surpnakha approaches Lakshman who is keeping watch over the hut in which Ram is with Sita. Surpnakha is of such a great beauty that "the mere act of seeing her gives great pleasure." Lakshman advises her to go to Ram. He describes Ram as "one who even when actually engaged in the sex-act poses as if he is not doing it."

In the Kamban Ramayan, the most popular Ramayan of the South, Surpnakha sees Ram when he is alone. Sita has gone for bathing in the river. Ram keeps on listening to Surpnakha very patiently. Only when Sita comes to him, does he start making fun of Surpnakha. The whole episode

has been described thus by Mr. C. Rajagopalachari:

“Thus in Panchvati, beside the river Godavari, love flowed smoothly between the banks of *dharm*. Just then Fate conspired with Lust to drag Surpnakha to the presence of Ram.

“The Lord Vishnu had left the Ocean of Milk and taken birth as Dasharath’s son, to rid the earth of the enemies of the gods. But how was Surpnakha to know this?

“Beholding the beauty of his person, she wondered: Is this Manmath or Indra or Shiv or Vishnu? But Manmath has no body. Indra has a thousand eyes, and Shiv has a third eye in the forehead, and Vishnu has four arms; so he cannot be Indra, Shiv or Vishnu. Perhaps, after all, this is Manmath who has recovered his body through penance, after it had been reduced to ashes by Shiv’s wrath. If it be Manmath, why should this handsome hero still perform penance? Why should this lotus-eyed youth waste his time in *tapas*?

“So she stood there wondering, watching, unable to turn her eyes away. She thought, my own form would fill him with disgust. I shall change my appearance and then approach him.

“She transformed herself into a beautiful young woman and appeared before him like the full moon. Her slender frame was like a golden creeper climbing up the Kalpak tree in Heaven. Her lovely lips and teeth were matched by her fawn-like eyes.

“Her gait was that of a peacock. Her anklets made music as she came near. Ram looked up and his eyes beheld this creature of ravishing beauty. She bowed low and touched his feet. Then she withdrew a little with modesty shading her eyes.

“Ram welcomed her, imagining that she was a visitor from some distant place, and inquired: ‘Which is your place? What is your name? Who are your kinsfolk?’

“She answered: ‘I am the daughter of the grandson of

Brahma, Kuber is a brother of mine. Another is Ravan, conqueror of Kailash. I am a maiden and my name is Kamvalli.'

" 'And what is your purpose in coming here?'

" 'It is not proper for a woman to speak out the trouble in her mind. And yet I suppose I must speak it out. The God of Love has invaded my heart. You can and should save me.'

"She paused. Ram remained silent. And she went on, 'You may wed me with Gandharv rites. You know it is permitted for lovers to come together in this manner. Once we are joined in this way, not only will happiness be ours, but friendship between you and my brother, the great Ravan, will follow. You are alone in this forest and the Rakshasas will molest you. Even if you do not provoke them, they will give you trouble because you are dressed as an ascetic. If you marry me, you will be free from all this danger. Not only that, my powerful people will be ready to serve you in all ways. Consider this well.'

"Thus she pleaded for the fulfilment of her desire, citing authority and appealing to Ram's self-interest also.

"Ram laughed revealing his beautiful pearly teeth. Just then, Sita was coming towards them through the plants and creepers, herself looking like another creeper. Surpnakha saw and marvelled at her loveliness.

"Not knowing who she was, Surpnakha angered by lust, told Ram: 'This girl is a Rakshasi in human form. She has come to deceive you. Beware of her. This is not her real form. She is a Rakshasi that eats raw meat. Throw her out. Have nothing to do with her.'

"Ram laughed again. 'You are indeed wise,' said he. 'You have found out the truth about her.'

"Meanwhile, Sita had come and stood by Ram. Surpnakha could not understand what Ram was laughing for. In her lust, she had quite lost her wits. She hissed at Sita: 'Why do you approach this hero of mine. O Rakshasi? Go away from here.'

“Sita, bewildered and afraid, hung on the prince’s shoulder, and she, then, seemed like a lightning flash hugging a rain-bearing cloud.

“Ram now saw that the joke had gone too far and said. ‘Dear lady, please stop, lest my brother should hear you. He is quick tempered and terrible when angry. I advise you to go back quickly the way you came.’ Saying this, Ram took Sita with him and went into the hermitage.

“The fire of her desire unquenched, the Rakshasi spent the night somewhere, somehow. In the morning, she thought: ‘I shall die if I do not get this man. So long as this girl is with him, he will never come near me. I must contrive to carry her off and put her away somewhere and then I may secure his love.’ Thus resolved, she came again to the Ashram.

‘Ram had gone to the river for his morning ablutions and prayer and Sita was alone in the Ashram. Surpnakha reckoned this was her chance to carry her off. She did not notice that Lakshman was in the wood nearby. She rushed towards Sita. Lakshman shouted and sprang on the Rakshasi. Catching hold of her hair, he kicked her and drew his sword.

“Surpnakha when attacked resumed her own shape and attacked Lakshman. Lakshman easily caught hold of her and drove her off.

“Surpnakha ran into the forest, bleeding and loudly appealing to her kinsfolk: ‘Oh, brother Khar! Oh, brother Ravan! Oh, Indrajit! Oh, kings of the Rakshas race! Are you all asleep? A mere man has insulted me and cut off my nose. Do you not hear my lamentations?’ Thus, at the top of her voice, the monster ran shouting.

“This is Kamban’s version of the episode, Surpnakha approaches and tries to attract Ram, hiding her true form and appearing like a beautiful human girl. This variation is supported in a way by Valmiki’s description of Surpnakha as Kamroopini, that is, one able to assume whatever form she liked.

“The Tamil poet appears to have felt something wrong or wanting in the Valmiki story and has woven an episode showing how bestial passion works.” (Pages 131-133)

In certain other versions, Ram does not encounter Surp-nakha at all!

Already (when the image of Ram in the public mind was discussed) instances were given that people do consider Ram as fallible before the temptations of sex. These instances were of the Bhajans sung in the temples of Ayodhya, and of Ram’s falling in love with Sita much before he married her. Also, there was a quotation from the Valmiki Ramayan which described a wine party in the gardens of Ayodhya.

DASHARATH

THE VALMIKI Ramayan itself gives us at many places what the people of Ayodhya, and some many important characters of Ramayan, thought about Dasharath.

Dasharath had innumerable keeps in his harem, besides the three wedded wives. Valmiki refers to this when he describes the ceremonies that took place when Dasharath held an Ashwamedh Yajna. The passage runs like this:

“Then Maharani Kaushalya, in a very happy mood, worshipped the God Horse, and killed it by three strokes of the sword. After this, in her desire to gain *dharm* the Maharani remained with that horse for a night. Then on the orders from the *hota*, *adhvarvu* and *udgata*. King Dasharath's other queens (of the Kshatriya clans), *vavatas* (women of the Vaishya clans) and *Paribrittis* (women of the Shudra clans) were brought in contact with the genetic organ of the horse.” (*Balkand*, Canto 14, *Shloks* 33-36.)

On hearing from Kaikeyi that king Dasharath has banished him for 14 years, Ram goes to his mother Kaushalya. There Valmiki describes:

“To the weeping mother of Ram, angry Lakshman spoke thus, well according to the occasion, ‘O mother, I do not like this a bit that Ram should go like this to the jungle, leaving the throne. What would not a hen-pecked king, who is easily-

influenced by women, who is wrong-headed, senile, a slave to his lecherous desires, not do on the bidding of a woman? Neither do I see any blemish nor any shortcoming in Ram for which he should be exiled. I will kill such an old, lecherous, feminish, shameless king like an irreligious one...' Hearing these words of Lakshman the sorrowing Kaushalya spoke, weeping, to Ram, 'Son, you have heard what Lakshman has said. Now act as you think most proper. But you cannot leave Ayodhya, leaving your sorrowful mother behind, on the anti-religious orders from my rival-wife.' ” (Ayodhyakand, Canto 21, Shloks 2-22.)

The people of Ayodhya say: “Shame to the lecherous King Dasharath.” (Ayodhyakand, Canto 49, Shlok 4.)

In the *Aranyakand* of the Valmiki Ramayan, Ravan in the garb of a Sannyasi, comes to Sita when Ram and Lakshman have gone after the golden deer. Sita tells Ravan about her family. Among other things, she says:

“My husband has big eyes, large hands. He is always busy doing good to others. But his lecherous father, to please Kaikeyi, did not crown Ram even when the latter had reached him to get crowned.” (*Aranyakand*, Canto 47, Shloks 12-13.)

It may thus be concluded that the poem *Ram Ka Antardwandwa*, was not written with any malicious intent, or with intent to injure the sentiments of any person. In view of what has been submitted above, the author had no reason to believe that the contents of the poem were ever likely to injure the sentiments of any section of the Hindu community.

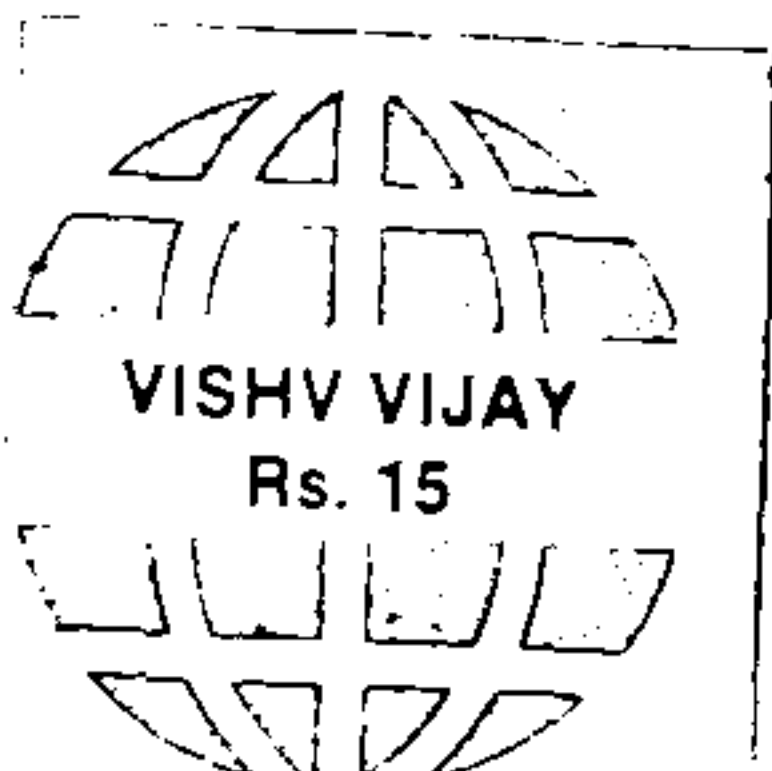
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A Study In the Ethics of the **Banishment of Sita**

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